The Beginning Or The End!

A Journal about Life, Living with Cancer, and Everything Under the Sun!
As told by Tom Glassey, popular author of "Who's Afraid of the Dark"

With his first book, an autobiography, Tom Glassey takes the reader on an incredible journey through his life, growing up as a blind child in Castletown, Isle of Man. Tom lost his eyesight to *Retinalblastoma*, cancer of the retina, at two years of age. Fast-forward 52 years. Tom is diagnosed with *Small-cell Lung Cancer.* He again chose to share his story, this time in the form of a 'blog' on ManxForums.com. Tom's blog became an overnight sensation, gathering readers from around the world. By popular request, Toms 'blog' has now been edited into book form. His wit, humor, candor, and love of Life again come through to his audience. Far from being a tale of woe, Tom delights his readers with his local characters, stories, flashbacks and dreams of the future. Come along with Tom, his wife Barbara, their menagerie of pets and his other readers, on their journey . It will open your eyes as you gain vision from a man who has no eyesight; yet sees with the Wisdom of Heart and Soul.

The Beginning Or The End!

By Tom Glassey

February 21, 2008

An old friend of mine, Norman Kelly, the former custodian at Castle Rushen sat on a bench on a summer's day on Castletown Square chatting to a bunch of tourists. After listening to his fascinating tales one of them asked him had he lived here all his life? After pondering the question for a few seconds he replied, "No, not yet."

I was in Nobles Hospital yesterday; it was my first day of chemotherapy. At some point during the day a nurse asked me if I had been a smoker all my life. I recalled Norman's words and found myself replying, "No, hopefully, not yet". No, the chemo will decide just exactly how much of my life I will live as a nonsmoker.

I gave up the pipe 4 months ago. At that time I didn't know that cancer was already knocking on my door. Just a couple of week's later shortness of breath and persistent coughing had forced me to see my doctor and the rest is history.

The trouble is, we smokers don't take any notice of Government warnings on packets and they can advertise 'til they're blue in the face on the TV about the dangers of smoking. It matters not. Why? Well I guess it's not because we think it won't happen to us. It's because we think it won't happen yet. I always thought there would be time to pack in smoking. I would pack in at the first sign of breathlessness or when the coughing started. Well of course I waited for those things and sure enough they came. My cancer didn't come barging through the front door; he entered slowly, almost so you don't even notice he has arrived. By the time he has over stayed his welcome and is starting to annoy you, it's too late. He has sold you his wares and you have signed on the dotted line. Over the years I have witnessed close friends who smoked suffer and die from lung cancer, yet even that did not influence me to pack in smoking. I always thought I would have time. There would be enough warnings and I would sort it. For many of us smokers the only time it really hits home is when we sit in front of the doctor and he reads the results of the CT scan back. "There is a possibility you have lung cancer." Well if you think you will have time to sort out packing in smoking, then that is exactly just how much time most of you will have.

I was never in favour of the smoking ban, I believe that people should have choices and I cannot see why we can't have smoking venues and nonsmoking venues. Better still, why wait for the ban? Whether you like it or not, as a smoker, you are bang on course for the nonsmoking zone. They did not wait for legislation in the graveyards to impose a smoking ban. It just kind of goes without saying.

Yesterday was my first day of chemo. It was either the first day of the rest of my life, or near to the end of it. I am very optimistic, although I'm not quite sure why. I have faith, but in goodness knows what. I am not a religious person. However, maybe the prayers, good wishes and chemo will be just a tad too heavy for the cancer to bear. I stopped smoking my pipe because I did not want my young Collie dog, Skipper to outlive me. I wanted to be around for my friends and family. I hope I have not left it until too late and I will give this thing my best shot. If just one of you good folk who read this kicks the habit, then this is worth while and even if you don't, but you start to think about it, then that is a very acceptable goal for me.

As I blog my way through chemo it will be nice if you come with me and even if as a smoker you don't kick the weed, at least keep me company along the way.

February 22, 2008

This is day 3 after my first intravenous chemotherapy session. I also had to take chemo tablets yesterday and today. So far I have experienced no side effects whatsoever. Still, we have a long way to go and who knows what might be in store.

I like to finish each day with a pint or two of bitter and until four months ago, a pipe would have accompanied those pints. I loved my pipe and still miss it dearly. What a shame it did not show the same level of affection towards me.

It is strange how when you are aware that you have cancer you start thinking of your life in days. Days start to matter. You don't know how many you might have left so you want to use them to the maximum. Hopefully my chemo treatment will turn my days to weeks, my weeks to months and my months to years.

Before my chemo treatment had commenced I had done my research on the possible side effects and to be honest I was quite fearful on that first day. However, once I had been connected up to Freddie, (the name, given by Nurse Ruth, to the machine that fed my drip) my fears began to melt away. About 6 pints of this chemo stuff was being pumped in to me over a 3-hour period and it really felt like the cancer was being washed out of me.

As Freddie slowly discharged his cancer cleaning fluids in to my system, two hours later I still had no side effects and I started to feel totally relaxed. It was time for a chat with the nurses and our brief conversation went something along these lines:

Me: “Nurse, if I feel like a beer tonight will it be ok to have one?”
Nurse: “You won’t feel like one, you will be feeling sick.”
Me: “But what if I’m not!”
Nurse: “You will be too ill tonight.”
Me: “But what if I’m fine, will it be ok to have a pint?”
Nurse: “Trust me, you won’t feel like a beer tonight”

It was time now for a change of tact.

Me: “OK, what if I feel like walking my dog Skipper tonight then?”
Nurse: “You won’t feel like walking the dog tonight, you’ll be too tired.”
Me: “But what if I’m not, can I still walk Skipper?”
Nurse: “You won’t want to walk Skipper, Captain or any other dog, not tonight.”

We were going nowhere fast.

I was back home several hours later and it had been a long time since I felt so fit. My breathlessness had almost completely gone. I felt like I could walk the dog for miles and drink the brewery dry. I certainly didn’t feel sick. I was off to a great start and I am still charging along, feeling fantastic. Yes, for sure the cancer is still inside me doing what it will, but I feel like it has now met its match with the chemo and my more positive attitude.

Yes, a pipe would be very nice right now, but look what kind of a friend he turned out to be. Sure I loved my pipe. However, I love my wife, family, friends, and Skipper a lot more than I ever loved tobacco. So why did it have to come to this? I think most smokers believe there is a chance they might end up with cancer. Trouble is we always think we will have time to pack in before it gets to us. When we start to cough or become short of breath, it’s usually too late. We smokers are like soldiers waging war each day against cancer’s bullets. Even though from time to time we witness our comrades being laid low we bash on because we believe that somehow we will manage to dodge the bullets. However, it only takes one cancer sniper to be successful and we fall too, as I now know to my cost.

February 23, 2008

So, we’ve hit day three, or is it four of chemotherapy. I have decided to stop counting the days. It's a rather meaningless task. It's a bit like sitting and watching the hands on the clock go round. What matters is that I have woken up feeling really good again.

I had friends round last night for a few drinks, old sailing friends and we really enjoyed the evening. I went to bed feeling good and I have woken up with a ‘feel good factor’
.
The wind is blowing from the Southwest today at about Force 6 or 7. Its going to be a nice fresh one when I take Skipper for his walk probably out on Fort Island. Just a few short weeks ago, walking Skip was not possible. I would have become breathless within a few yards. Can chemo really be working this quickly? I don't know, but something is. Well maybe I am just going through a good spell. Maybe things will take a turn for the worst later. Well, I don't know that either. All I know is that life feels really good right now so let's make the best of it.

Two months ago I was running a business. It took up most of my time. I owned a boat and walked my dog six miles a day. It seemed that over night, the walking stopped; I was forced to sell my business and now the boats gone to. A very strange irony that I had so many things taking up my time and now that cancer has struck possibly taking a hefty lump from my allotted time, I suddenly have time on my hands. But what now will I do with this time? I said at the beginning that I would no longer be counting the days. Life is but a mere measurement of time given to us by goodness knows whom. They have the whistle. They have the stopwatch. They own the time. For me now, my aim is to keep my goals simple and achievable. I am on a journey and my vision is beautiful and scenic. I am traveling through today and my destination is tomorrow.

February 24, 2008

I have awakened feeling really good once again. Yesterday was a very good day for me. I managed to walk all the way from Poulson Park to the waterfall and back with Barbara & Skipper. This is the most I have ventured since my cancer broke out just a few short months ago.

It's quite amazing how your life can be changed or turned on its head in just a very short time, no matter how much long term planning you might do.

My daily routine, up until about mid November, was to rise every morning round about 5 a.m. I would fetch a pot of tea up to the bedroom, return to bed and listen to the breakfast news on the TV or radio. My wife Barbara would wake around 6:00, and by 7:00, both Barbara and I, along with Skipper, would be bouncing around Langness Peninsula. We would drive out to the car park and then walk down the Derbyhaven side, around the lighthouse and back to the car park, taking about 45 minutes. I can think of no better way to begin your working day than with a brisk walk around somewhere such as Langness.

I have been totally blind since the age of two. That was my first dice with cancer. The doctors removed both my eyes to successfully prevent the cancer from spreading. I may well have lost my eyesight at that point, but I'm sure I gained my vision.

Up until 5 years ago, I had been employed at the Royal Bank of Scotland for 10 years. My guide dog, Escort would travel with me to work from Castletown to Douglas every day. Barbara worked at Zurich International, so we would drive to work in the car, Barbara would drop me outside Zurich and I would walk along Athol Street to the bank on Victoria Street.

Escort was the last of my 4 guide dogs, and when he eventually grew too old to work and retired, I decided he would be the last, at least for now. Shortly after Escort retired as a working dog, I left the bank and setup my own business, Island Office Minder. I ran this business from a converted bedroom at home. It was, and still is, a telephone answering and message service. As I was now working from home, I no longer had the need for a guide dog, so Escort took on the role of a pet Golden Retriever and every morning we would stroll around Poulson Park, which now served as my half mile

walk to work. At 15 years of age, poor old Escort eventually hung up his doggy clogs and very reluctantly went to meet up with ‘The Boss’

.

I was brought up a strict Roman Catholic by the Sisters of Charity at St Vincent's school for the blind in Liverpool. Although I lived and breathed very healthy portions of religion as a child, religion just never really grew on me, at least not the conventional sort. I simply never felt close to God in a church. I am not even sure who God is or where He might dwell. I dismiss nothing though, and I am fairly opened minded about the whole thing. It seems to me that God is many different things to people. As far as I am concerned, one day I will meet up with The Boss. When that day arrives I will simply accept my appraisal and fall in to line.

I am 54 years old now and I have so much to be grateful for. Yes, this is my second dance with cancer. However, they are not playing the last waltz yet and who knows what tomorrow might bring, or even the next hour. Little things can, and do make such a big difference to our lives. A simple little change of routine to our daily lives can make a vast difference.

I have always had a dog and couldn't imagine life without one, so when Escort moved on, hopefully to pastures greener, and Meg, our other pet Collie died last year, the period of dog less-ness was to be short lived.

We sort of stumbled across Skipper on a farm in Kirk Michael. He was, by then, a one year old rejected sheep dog and we loved him at first sight. Of course Skipper is no guide dog, in fact he is as wild as a mountain hare, none-the-less that hardly mattered.

Now that I had left the bank and was running Island Office Minder, my early morning walks had changed. Both Barbara and I would now be out on Langness at 7 a.m. with Skipper bouncing along beside us, behind us, ahead, or wherever.

Langness is a beautiful place and you need to use a great deal more than your eyesight to appreciate it. What better way is there to begin your working day than walking on a carpet of lush grass, breathing the fresh salt air of Castletown Bay? Nothing beats the sound of the skylarks, oystercatchers, lapwings and the singing seals bathing on the rocks in the early morning sunshine. If 45 minutes of this did not put you in a good frame of mind for a days work, then nothing ever will.

I am so lucky that my wife Barbara enjoys the same pleasures in life as I do. She will one day probably paint the scene I have just described. That painting will probably end up hanging on someone else’s wall, but it matters not, the memory remains, only the painting will move on. For me, the painting lives on forever, as I can recall the sounds and the memories of walking on Langness whenever I like. A couple of months ago I wondered if I might ever walk there again. I am only a few days in to chemo and the strength to walk has been restored to me, at least for now. If this is not meant to last then no worries as I can be back on Langness in my mind at anytime, in a twinkle. In the greater scheme, Life is but a mere twinkle. Today will pass in no time at all, and Tomorrow is a gift that might be granted, but I don't take it for granted.

February 25, 2008

So, here we are deep in to our first week of chemotherapy. It’s Monday morning. A couple of months ago, Monday mornings would have been a busy time being the first day back in the office after the weekend and all that. The business has now gone and the office, where I am now typing this blog, is a quiet peaceful place where the phone has now fallen completely silent.

Today I have awakened feeling good again. A couple of friends called round last night for drinks, Michael, my lifelong seafaring friend and David, who is the Practice Manager from the doctor’s surgery over in Port Erin. We had a few beers and of course, put the world to rights. However, it all seems to have fallen apart again over night, as listening to the news this morning, most of the things we righted are still pear shaped.

I have not begun my day with a walk today. My wife Barbara has deemed the weather to be too bad, so she has taken Skipper alone for a wander around Poulson Park. It’s blowing a gale from the Southwest now and they have given heavy rain to follow later.

I was looking forward to a trip out to Fort Island this morning. I love Fort Island. Mind you, I love everywhere. One of the wonderful things about living on this island is that every walk is my favourite walk, whether it’s strolling along the banks of the Silverburn River, out to Langness, Fort Island, or just a stroll around Castletown Quayside.

At the front of my house runs the main road into Castletown. At the back is Poulson Park, the Silverburn River and the Steam Railway. I do not need eyesight to know that the days are growing longer. The birds are singing deeper into the evenings and closer to the dawn. Soon the sound of the steam train’s shrill whistle will be heard again as its rattles its way from Douglas to Port Erin and vice versa. The swallows will soon return. The boats that have wintered on the quayside will soon be back in the water and the harbour will come alive with a hive of activity, boats coming and going, swans and signets, ducks and ducklings. Warm summer breezes will replace the harsh winter gales. Sunshine will bring smiles to people’s faces and the shrieks of happy children will echo from Poulson park again. The winter will melt away into remission. Hopefully the cancer will too. One or both may return. But between them the sun will shine, and I will live and enjoy today and not waste energy on yearnings for tomorrow.

February26, 2008

Well I have woken up feeling fine once again. I think I might have had one or two signs of the chemo side effects for the first time yesterday. I felt tired by 7:30 and by 8:00 could hardly keep awake so I gave in and retired to bed where I slept right through until 6 a.m.

Today the wind is blowing hard from the Southwest. The forecast tells me it’s going to reach around 55 mph. I guess that will mean no walks for Skipper and I today so it’s looks like it’s down to Barbara to do the honours once again. This is now two days running, as high winds meant I couldn’t get out yesterday either. I can cope with most aspects of the weather, but in the wind I have difficulty in breathing. Never mind, according to the forecast better times are coming tomorrow. I’m not expecting very much to happen today, but then I wasn’t yesterday either. It’s strange how very small and seemingly insignificant events can come along and have such an impact on you. Yesterday afternoon as I sat on the sofa, the phone rang. My old friend and former chief minister, Donald Gelling, had heard my news and decided to give

me a call. Old friends don't need to say much, they hardly need to say anything at all, and just the sound of their reassuring voice is often all you need to hear. It gives you such a lift and replenishes hope.

Mind you it doesn't necessarily take an old friend to give you a boost. The comments left by readers on the blog do so also. Writing the blog has sort of broadened the whole thing out. It is not just family and friends that walk with me now on this journey, but lots of other folk have joined us and they share in our ups and downs along the way. You really do feel so much stronger and able to cope when you know you are not alone and it is not just friends and family, but strangers too. But a stranger is simply a friend you have not yet met.

I have always been fascinated by the weather. I love all aspects of weather. The long hot summer days, but also the wild cold winter days too. The weather, for me, very much reflects life in general. Long hot summer days make us feel good. But what about those cold dark windblown winter days? Well, they have their magic too. Do you not feel exhilarated by your windows rattling and the house shaking in the gnawing teeth of a severe winter's storm? We would simply never fully appreciate the spring birds nesting, the mountain heather and the warmth of summer, had we not endured the long, dark, wet and windy winter.

As I tap out this blog on my computer the wind is howling outside. It's now 10:15 a.m. and Barbara and Skipper are back from their walk. Skipper has wandered in to my office and has his head against my side, desperately trying to gain my attention. A tear falls, I don't know why. I have moved my left hand from the keyboard and placed it on his head. It's now time to blog with Skipper. My tear has gone. It must have watered a smile and everything is fine now. I had a bad moment. But just like the weather, it was nothing more than a shower and the sun is shining again now.

February27, 2008

So here we are, one full week into chemotherapy and we are still rolling along. Yesterday was the worst day so far with lots of tears, yet I have no explanation. I didn't feel any worse than any other day. I just felt tearful and sad for most of the day. Maybe this is part of chemo I don't know, but I have woken up feeling fine again today. Who knows what it might bring? Yesterday just about everything brought tears to my eyes, thoughts aimlessly wondering in my mind, comments regarding the blog, and phone calls from friends.

I read a message from 'Topaz' yesterday. I don't know who 'Topaz' is but I well recall the times he talks of when we lived in Port St Mary. They were 12 wonderful months of our lives and Topaz's recollections brought tears of joy and sadness. His words made me realize that we really have absolutely no concept of how significant or insignificant anything we do really is. Who would have thought that ten years ago someone singing a few lines of a song at closing time in the Station Hotel, Port St Mary, would still play a part on someone's mind 10 years on?

I said that yesterday was a tearful day, but yet just exactly how significant is a tear? Many a time I have stood on the banks of the Silverburn by the waterfall, halfway to Ballasalla and have listened to the power of the water. After a period of heavy rainfall I have felt the ground beneath my feet tremble as the Silverburn hurled its contents towards the Irish Sea. Then slowly, as I wend my way back to Castletown, I hear those same waters gently splashing over the stones as it threads its way through town to the open sea. The Silverburn discharges in to Castletown Harbour, then out in to Castletown Bay and eventually out into the great blue yonder and into the great oceans of the world. That powerful ground shaking volume of water I stood by at the waterfall is now so insignificant that it can hardly be counted, and so it is with my tears. They are only significant at their source. They fall from my eyes, drift down my face and disappear in to the great expanse of life. No doubt they will find their way through the drainage system to the Silverburn River and eventually make their way to the great blue yonder, where they too, will become insignificant, just tiny units measuring sorrow.

Today though is going to be a good day. The wind has fallen away and I will be able to walk with Barbara & Skipper. We will probably head out to Fort Island in the car and stop of at the beach, maybe on the way home. I have slept well and I am ready for whatever today throws at me. This cancer thing is too big to take on as a whole so you fight it day by day. You won't win every day, you can't win every battle, you just fight each day as it comes along and hopefully we will win most of them.

Writing the blog is teaching me much about life, myself, and other people. I know now that I am not simply writing a diary of events for folks to read and follow my progress. Most of you reading this blog have problems of your own. You don't have to blog all your thoughts on a website for them to be recognized. Simply come along with us for the ride and hold on to the person nearest to you, it doesn't matter who it is, on this ship everyone's a friend.

Yesterday I received an email from Linda. Linda is a fellow cancer sufferer. Hang on in there Linda Love, our soldiers are digging in Sweetheart, we will have the enemy on the run soon enough.

A couple of days ago a sad tale came my way from a fellow blogger, Scrappy. My wife was reading his entries and one simply said he was going to discontinue his blog for the time being as his wife died suddenly in January. I felt so sorry for you. If you have, by now, blown out your blog my friend, relight it again. If you haven't the energy or the inclination, then pull a chair up closer to mine for there is enough heat around this fire to warm us all.

Skipper has crawled under the desk in my office having abandoned all hope of getting me out for walks. I have a 'feel good factor' that I can't explain, just as I could not explain yesterday's downer. I can feel the sunshine coming through my window and I can hear the kids across the road at Victoria Road School. They sound like they haven't got a care in the world. I can hear the traffic passing down below on the main road in to Castletown. It's Wednesday, the 27th of February with nothing special about it. It's just another very ordinary day, apart from the fact that it is special, very special. It is special because it is here, it has arrived, and it is ours, for tomorrow is a dream, a hope and a prayer.

February 28, 2008

Today is going to be an eventful day. For one thing, Pooil Vaaish will arrive shortly to fit granite worktops in our kitchen. Barbara has wanted granite worktops ever since we owned our first kitchen. Brother Lenny and wife Rosie own Pooil Vaaish, so after securing a very favourable rate, the work will finally commence today. This means it would be probably in our best interests to go out for the day. The camper van is loaded and ready and within the next hour we shall head for the Point of Ayre.

I don't get to the Point of Ayre as often as I would like to these days. Like most other places on this Island, it is one of my favourite places. I get just as excited and worked up about going to the Ayres as anyone else would if they were going

on holiday abroad. I have never had a foreign holiday apart from a day trip to Norway. It is not something I yearn for though. When I have time off I love to go with the dog and no restrictions, to any of the wonderful places around the Island, which up until now due to my work, just did not allow me enough time to do. Two months ago I was running a business every day and apart from dog walks during mornings and evenings, I had no time to go anywhere. Now, thanks to a bit of a setback with the cancer and chemo, I have more time than I know what to do with.

Anyway, back to the Point of Ayre; I guess those who market our island from a tourist point of view, don't send their photographers out to the Ayres with intent of showing off the wonderful scenic photographs on the pages of their holiday brochures. Yet the Ayres are beautiful to those who look. Visually, you will not be bowled over by its beauty. However, if you listen, walk and look; solitude, peace and contentment abound. The sound of the sea washing over the shingle of the Ayres is pure and natural. The seabirds and wildlife are there because they choose to be, and not because of an aquarium or a sea life centre or whatever. No one will try to sell you a hat, a chunk of rock or cart you off on a donkey ride. The terns and gannets will make no charge for their natural performances. You can walk for hours among the sand dunes with the breeze blowing in your face and the salt air filling your lungs. All this to the music of the sea and the choirs of birds regaling you, and it's all absolutely free.

When we lived in Ramsey we would spend many a weekend in a Bambi camper van out on the Ayres. Barbara used to look out over the sea to Whithorn through the binoculars. Whithorn is the nearest part of the UK to the Island, some 16 miles across from the Point. We often wondered what it might be like there. Eventually our curiosity got the better of us so Barbara and I, with our two dogs, boarded the *King Orry* as it was then, and drove up through the Lake District and Southwest Scotland to Whithorn, a distance of around 200 miles. A heck of a journey to get to a place you could almost throw a stone to from the Point of Ayre lighthouse.

Our arrival in Whithorn was a disappointment to say the least. We parked the camper van in amongst all the litter, broken bottles and tin cans. Being a little short of one or two provisions, we ambled over to the ram shackled little shop. An old boy was closing for the afternoon. We asked politely, "What time do you open in the morning?" "Whenever I wakeup" replied the grumpy old git.

At least there was a pub and because it was called The Steam Packet, we guessed it must have some kind of Isle of Man connection. We wandered in and having ordered a pint for myself, and a drink for Barbara, I enthusiastically explained to the barman that we had come from the Isle of Man and were looking forward to spending a few days holiday here. "Oh right" says he. "We get 'em all the time over here from there, they are always coming over here, must be some what wrong with the place!"

The next day we left Whithorn and headed for the town of Newton Stewart. We parked our camper on a lorry park and spent our days walking the forests with our two dogs and drinking the nights away in the Central Bar with landlord George and some of the nicest folk you could ever wish to meet.

Well, that's it for today, I am off to the Point of Ayre now as Pooil Vaaish are pulling up outside. I will leave you with a thought for today; The Isle of Man is still one of the safest places to live in. It is still one of the few places where you can bolt your door with a boiled carrot.

February 29, 2008

What a special day today is then! Feb 29th only comes round once every four years. To many of us four years is neither here nor there. They hold the Olympics every four years. World Cups and general elections usually come around every four years or so. To someone that is terminally ill, four years is a vast ocean of time. Time is something we all measure using different criteria to suit our circumstances. We often get different answers to the same sums. To a high-flying busy person there are not enough hours in the day. For the tramp waking up on the park bench this morning, he is probably wondering how he will get the where-with-all and maybe what is the point in trying to fill another day?

We had a wonderful day out on the Point of Ayre yesterday. Today I noticed the dawn chorus began at 5:58 am. At least that was when I heard the first song thrush. By 6:20 they were all at it. It set me thinking, why do we humans behave so differently to the rest of the animal kingdom? At first light, the birds immediately burst in to song. My dog Skipper starts to bounce around the house as soon as he hears my voice. He is ready for walks within seconds of me waking. Why is that we humans wake up so slowly, turning over several times trying to grab an extra few minutes, then gingerly pussy footing around the house, often grumpy, with the brain only half active, for at least an hour or so. Just imagine what it would be like if we began our day taking a leaf from the birds. Imagine bursting into song as soon as your eyes opened. Instead of rolling over trying to grab an extra few moments, you would burst in to the latest Arctic Monkey's track, Oasis or whatever. Of course everyone else in your household would be doing the same thing. We would bounce along the pavement on our way to work with our ears ringing from a human dawn chorus, belching out from every house. Imagine how uplifted you would feel by the time you got to work. Well it certainly seems to work for the birds. But maybe we simply have too many things to worry about.

Maybe it's just me, but folk generally don't seem quite as happy as they used to be. I don't hear anyone whistling these days. As a youngster in the 1960's, as I walked in to Castletown from my home at Janet's Corner, I would hear the workers in the brewery whistling as I walked by, window cleaners up ladders, painters and street cleaners, all whistling as they worked. The quayside was a hive of activity with men discharging coal boats and whistling or belching out the latest Cliff Richards hit. People just seemed happier in their work and every day lives than they appear to be today. When I wander in to Castletown later I won't hear anyone whistling or singing and I might get some strange looks if I walk down Malew Street belting out one of my favourite songs. I will let you know tomorrow how I get on. Mind you, it's pouring with rain and blowing a gale today. I can't remember if the happy workmen of my childhood performed in bad weather. If I go waltzing down Malew Street this morning singing at the top of my voice, I may well be writing this blog from my padded cell on Monday.

March 1, 2008

It's been a very stormy night but things have calmed down now and I will be able to get out today. Sorry I did not manage to sing my way along Malew Street yesterday, thankfully the weather beat me. You may well have wondered what on Earth I was going on about yesterday, talking about the birds and the dawn chorus. I don't think I mentioned cancer or chemotherapy once in yesterday's blog. Well I guess the point is that cancer or chemo don't necessarily take over or dominate your whole life. Most of the time it is something that is going on in the background.

I am now deep in to my second week of chemo and I am feeling a heck of a lot better than I was a couple of months ago. That is not to say others are not suffering to a much greater extent, depending on their circumstances. I can only deal with whatever is sent my way and I dare say that conditions will change from time to time. At present we are sailing through choppy seas, but most ships can deal with that.

I note that today is the first day of March and that means at the end of this month, the smoking ban or restriction will come in to effect. As a former smoker I was not looking forward to the time when I would not be able to nip down to the local pub and enjoy a pint and a pipe. Of course recent events have changed all that. My damn pipe hasn't half landed me in it and the sinner has not suddenly become a saint. I can only hope now that the smoking restriction will mean that more smokers chuck the habit. When I smoked I did not want to hear the advice, let alone give it up. The Government warnings on the packets might as well have been written in Chinese.

As a youngster growing up in the 60's, generally speaking people seemed to be much more tolerant than they are today. I would not have been at all surprised to find an ashtray in the waiting room of the doctor's surgery back in those days. In fact, back then we smokers ruled the world. Nonsmokers only had the first 6 seats on a single-decker bus and smokers were deemed to be nearer to Godliness and were given the entire top deck of double-decker buses. People smoked all over the place and it didn't appear to be a problem to nonsmokers, either though, were dogs. Folks tended to accept that dogs wee'd on lampposts and occasionally pooped on public footpaths and no one walked around with doggy bags. We didn't have headphones either, so some folk walked around with transistor radios blaring out their very tinny sound in the street. I wonder at what point this intolerance to others started to kick in? Today it's almost as if you would be putting yourself at great risk simply by living in the same street as a smoker and kids are at risk of going blind should they come in to contact with Fido's poo. Well maybe a child would be at risk if they came into contact with dog poo and then rubbed it in to his eyes. However, having met literally hundreds of blind people throughout my life, I have yet to meet anyone who lost their sight through coming in to contact with dog poo.

In a couple of months the TT Races will be with us once again. I am not a TT fan. However, I am more than happy to accept the inconvenience it brings for the greater good. Public roads will be closed and it's a nightmare for folks trying to get to work and so on during this period. People will be injured and unfortunately some folk will be killed. At the end of the day it comes down to people having choices and choosing to do whatever it may be, even though sometimes that comes with great risk. I just can't help wondering what kind of a world it will be when all these choices are removed and we have no tolerances of others whatsoever. Smoking has caused me much grief and I strongly appeal to anyone to chuck the habit if you possibly can. Believe me, its better to be gasping for a smoke than gasping for life. At the end of the day, we all have to share this planet. We are all different and we all have our own aspirations. If we all end up being totally intolerant towards each other then this planet will not be a nice place to share. Yes, for sure it will be nice for us nonsmokers to have smoke free pubs and what have you, but do we really need all the pubs to be nonsmoking, every one of them? Surely we could spare a few for the smokers. This is a big planet with enough space for everyone. But then maybe that's the problem. Where does my space end and yours begin?

March 2, 2008

Yesterday proved to be yet another milestone. Not long after they had told me I had cancer I sold my boat, *Scarlett Queen*. Well I was already going to do that this year. The news that I had cancer sort of speeded things up a bit after all, I wasn't going to need a boat. It's a long time since I have been without a boat though and to be honest it just didn't feel right. I felt incomplete, disabled. For a boatman to be boat-less is like a cowboy without a horse or a bolt without a nut. Now that the chemo appears to be going well, and I do honestly believe that we are going to get on top of this cancer lark, I have to prove that I believe it to myself. The best way of doing that is by doing things for the future again, thinking of tomorrow, next week, next month or whatever.

I found myself wandering around the Balthane industrial estate with Barbara and there was this little boat sitting on a trailer all alone. She didn't even have a name. A phone call later and a cash offer meant that she is now mine. I will call her '*Silverburn*'. I have had so much joy over the years walking the banks of the Silverburn River. *Silverburn* needs very little work on her; she is more or less ready for sea. My boatman, young Chris Callow is going to be busy once again. Chris has looked after my boats since he was 15 or so. He lives about half a mile up the road. He fell in the harbour when he was 11 years old, badly smashing his legs. He is now fully recovered and still spends every spare minute of his time mucking around on the harbour. I simply bang off a text message like, "boat at the steps in 10 minutes please, we are going fishing" or "boat ready in 15 minutes please, we are all off to the Albert in Port St Mary" and it happens. Well I hope to be blogging about our maiden voyage on *Silverburn* in about two months time.

March 3, 2008

I'm just back from walking Skipper, my first solo walk since I began chemotherapy, now nearly two weeks ago. It was only a trip around Poulson Park with a free run for Skip in the fields along the Silverburn. Yet another sign of how things are improving. I am beginning to get parts of my old life back again.

Last night my old pal, Michael called round and we discussed sailing and fishing plans for this summer in my new boat. A couple of months ago I was staring in to a dark deep hole. I had lung cancer and was preparing myself for the last lap of life. Now just two weeks in to chemotherapy, I am out and about again. I am getting up at 6 a.m. just like I used to. I have a boat again and I am back walking the dog. Yes of course things may well take a turn for the worse, there might be something going on inside me that I don't know about. Who knows? At the same time maybe things are really improving. If I feel as if they are, then they must be. Barbara is even thinking of returning to work in some capacity next week. My thinking pattern has now changed from short term to medium term. I am grateful for today, but in my thoughts I am planning for tomorrow. I am not out of the woods yet and the storm is still raging all around me. However, our ship is in good shape, we are holding our course. Soon we will be clear of the Ocean of Despair and round the Cape of Hope and entering the Sea of Promise.

March 4, 2008

It is a fantastic morning! I have just returned from my walk with Barbara & Skipper. This morning we ventured to the waterfall at Ronaldsway and back. In the old days, and by that I mean 5 months ago, I would have gone on and sat on the steps of the footbridge and lit my pipe for half an hour before venturing on to Ballasalla. None-the-less a pipe-less walk along the Silverburn in the early morning sun is still a wonderful and enriching experience. I have tried sucking a hard sweet but believe me, a humbug is a very poor substitute for a fill of St.Bruno. Who was Bruno anyway and how the devil did he become a saint? That's another question for The Boss when I get up there.

We are now just about 3 weeks away from the smoking ban. I wonder just how many brewery ashtrays will turn up on e-Bay auction sites over the coming years, as they become collector items.

I remember one night calling by at one of the pubs on the Barbary Coast. I stood at the bar and as I pulled out my pipe I asked the landlord if there was an ashtray. “Your stood in it lad” was his reply. On another occasion when we lived in Ramsey, I recall visiting the Iron Pier for a Sunday lunchtime pint. Fumbling around on the bar for an ashtray I located an ashtray like object. As I discharged my pipe in to this over flowing ashtray I complained to landlord Tony Kaverner that he had not emptied his ashtrays from the night before. You would have heard the howls of disbelief in Port St. Mary as my pipe ash now coated the cheese and pickles that had been laid out for the Sunday lunchtime punters!

Well when the smoking ban comes, at least I will be able to make a return to the pub myself. Having ruined my own lungs at least I won’t be able to ruin anyone else’s. That reminds me of an epitaph my bottle-of-brandy-a-day Uncle Louis wanted on his gravestone. It went like this:

“I have drank to your health in taverns, I have drank to your health in my home,
I have drank to your health so many times, I have bloody well ruined my own.“

March 5, 2008

I have woken up feeling really good once again, its now exactly two weeks into chemo. Skipper is bouncing about ready for his morning hike. Today I think we will head up the Silverburn to the waterfall again.

Yesterday we had a visit from IOM newspapers, they have heard about our blog so I guess something will appear in amongst the skeet shortly.

I have been thinking during the night about the small, seemingly insignificant things in life that in the end can play a major part in reconstructing our lives or at least changing our course for the better or worse. For example, you would not think that little bits of rubber could have such a major influence on what we do and how we achieve it. You can write a best seller with a gold pen, yet you can achieve exactly the same thing with a pencil! However, without that little bit of rubber in the top of your pencil to iron out all those mistakes, all your labours would be fruitless. We boatmen can sail around the world, but we rely on little bits of rubber we call fenders to protect us from harbour walls and other obstacles.

I am reminded of a story that came my way from South Australia. A blind man stood at a bus stop waiting for a bus, when along came a husband, wife and their 10 kids. When the bus arrived there was only room onboard for the 10 kids and mother so, husband and the blind man began to walk. After a while the sound of the blind man’s white stick tapping the pavement began to annoy the husband and father of the 10 kids. “I say,” said he. “Can’t you fix a piece of rubber to the end of that stick of yours.” “I suppose so”, said the blind man, “However, had you fixed a piece of rubber to the end of your stick we would both be riding the bus!”

March 6, 2008

I am now just 6 days away from the next course of chemotherapy and so far I have gotten away with almost no side effects at all. I'm feeling good again today and it looks like I will get out this morning, probably to Langness Peninsula.

I no longer wake up thinking about lung cancer. Almost all of the daily reminders, shortness of breath, coughing and tiredness have gone.

I believe that there is a reason for everything, although not everything in life comes along with an explanation. Why would I be blind more or less from birth for example? All I know is that, being blind has brought many positives in to my life. If I had been born with sight I would never have had to leave the Island as a child and attend the school for the blind in Liverpool. This meant introducing me to the sea at the age of 5 and lead to a love affair that has lasted all my life. I would never have worked in the places I ended up and met the people who have influenced me and largely fashioned the person I have become. I probably would never have met Barbara, my wife, and therefore enjoyed 17 years of marriageable bliss. As for cancer, well I am still working on the positives for that. For one thing, I would not be sat here writing this blog and it may be that I will have to wait a little longer before any kind of explanation becomes clear. Maybe an explanation will only become clear to others after I have passed on.

Disabled people often become stereotyped. I remember walking into a pub in Ballasalla probably in the late 70's, a guy approached me and said, "Blimey Tom, what are you up to these days?" "Not a lot" I replied, "a bit of this and that". "Have you heard of Stevie Wonder?” he asked, "Yes", I replied. "Well" said he, "Stevie Wonder is a singer and has made loads of money and he is blind." "Blimey!" said I. "Have you ever heard of Paul McCartney? Guess what! He has made loads of money and he can see!" I'm not sure if my friend took my point or not. He probably bought me a pint and assumed I had already had a few too many.

I am reminded of a story that took place in St. Helens during the war and I guess this tale serves as an example to prove that just because Douglas Bader flew fighter planes with no legs, doesn't mean others with no legs can fly to the moon.

A German prisoner of war escaped from a prison camp in St Helens. He could not speak a word of English and needed to raise money to feed himself. To do this he busked on the street playing the accordion, of course he did not want to be asked any questions so he put up a sign saying ‘deaf and dumb’. When he was eventually arrested, the authorities asked him how he thought he would get away with playing the accordion posing as being deaf and dumb. He simply replied that Beethoven didn't do too bad, did he! I wonder where he found the accordion and who wrote the sign for him. Maybe they should have released him for initiative and enterprise.

I am not a follower or believer in any of the established churches. I do believe in God, the same God for all of us, who I call ‘The Boss’. So maybe The Boss up there will reward us all one day for initiative and enterprise and for dealing with all the various obstacles that are seemingly placed in our way as we navigate our way across the deep blue calm and sometimes the stormy, angry oceans of life.

March 7, 2008

Yesterday I reported to Doctor Smith at the hospital for a check up. Good news, as I am in such good condition he does not want to see me again now until my final chemo session. All appears to be going well. We are not yet out of cancer’s black hole. However, the hole is not so black at present, there is a light and I am heading towards it.

I guess everyone at some point in his or her life has been in a pit of despair and felt that everything is hopeless and you are doomed. I bet the Liverpool footballers and their supporters felt doomed when they were 3-0 down at halftime in the European Cup Final. If someone had appeared in their dressing room and told them not to worry, they would end up winning the cup, they would have been laughed at. Liverpool came out for the second half and went on to win the cup. Triumph lurks in the pit of disaster.

Back in 1982 I was making my way home, well not home exactly, back to my digs in North Wales. I had been to the pub having arrived in the town of Abergele for a six-month stint just a few days ago. I was on a furniture restoration course. I have to say most of the chairs and tables I restored left the place in a worse state than they had come in. Anyway, one of the first things I did after arriving was to venture down to the local pub to get to know the locals. I had located the pub without a problem. However, heading home at 11p.m., with a few beers in me was a different kettle of fish. It was mid January and freezing cold. Somewhere a long the line I took a wrong turning and ended up wandering round an unused fairground. I ended up spending the entire night wandering round the fairground stumbling into objects and unable to find my way out of the place. It was too cold to sit down so I had to keep moving, but the risk of keeping on the move meant that I simply stumbled in to more objects. There were certainly moments during the night where I felt total despair. I was in a strange place, in unfamiliar surroundings. The only people I knew were the half dozen chaps I had spent the evening with in the pub. After stumbling around the fairground for hours I eventually came across the gateway. What a moment of bliss to feel a pavement under my feet again and traffic whizzing by! I still did not know my way back to my residence, but at least I was now on a road again. By now the birds were well in to the dawn chorus and the good folk of North Wales were making their way to work. As I stumbled along the road a lorry load of morning joy came to a screeching halt. The lorry was a bin lorry and was driven by one of the chaps I had been drinking with in the pub the previous evening. I gratefully accepted his offer of a lift and put my experience of that night out on the tiles never to be repeated. Still, how sweet is the morning air and how wonderful is the day after spending a truly horrendous night in a fairground!

Back in 1963 I was a 10-year old kid away from home at the blind school in Liverpool. I recall one evening Captain Jack Ronan from the IOM Steam Packet came out to visit me at school. He took me back to his ship the *Mona's Isle* berthed at the landing stage at the pier head. After spending a couple of hours onboard with the rest of the crew and with my pockets filled with sweets from the buffet bar, he returned me to the convent. As we walked up the long gravely driveway, Captain Jack noticed a tear or two in my eyes and just before we passed through the large heavy doors of the main hallway, where I would be handed back over to the care of the nuns, he placed his hand on my shoulder and said. "Fear not lad, this will all pass, one day you will simply look back at these times and it will be just a distant memory".

Well now of course I do just that. I believe that one day I will simply look back on this cancer as nothing more than a distant memory. Remember, wherever you are, whoever you are, all things pass. Despair is never permanent.

March 8, 2008

I had a little scare yesterday morning as I woke up with a cold, or at least what I thought was a cold. I am now so close to my second course of chemo coming up this Wednesday. A cold now would be disastrous. If I turn up on Wednesday with a cold or any kind of an infection or a temperature of 37.5C, they will not treat me with the second course of chemo. Fortunately I have woken up this morning feeling fine again so the scare is over for now. I have been getting just a tad cocky lately. I have made two trips to Port Erin chippie and eaten in. A dodgy game when you are on chemotherapy as you can't afford to pickup any viruses or colds that might be doing the rounds.

Last night I had a couple of beers on my own and listened to a bit of telly whilst firing off text messages to my young niece Beth over in Wigan and some local friends.

I have been thinking about money lately and wondering was I happier as a kid growing up on the Janet's Corner housing estate in Castletown back in the 1950's and 60's where money was a scarce commodity? I guess the answer is; I was no poorer then than I am now. You don't feel like a pauper when everyone around you is in the same boat. When everyone is skint, money doesn't really matter. A dollop of it came around every Friday, which was payday. Saturdays and Sundays were fine then, you spent Monday to Thursday clinging to the weak and breaking branches of the money tree until Friday came round once again. Money and jobs are now much more plentiful than they once were. How many times did our parents have to remind us that money didn't grow on trees! It doesn't, but now it comes out of a hole in the wall.

When I was a kid the corner shop use to give us tick, which was really a form of credit, for the working classes. When the idea caught on amongst the movers and shakers, they simply coined a more fashionable phrase and called it 'credit'. I remember Jack who ran the shop on the promenade telling me this story: A young girl came in to his shop clutching a note. The note read. "Jack, can you let me have a loaf of bread, a quarter of tea and a tin of beans and I will pay you as soon as my husband comes home for his tea?" "Well Tom" said Jack, "that was 30 years ago and he still hasn't turned up for his tea yet!"

Of course we all need money and thankfully most of us have more of it now than our parents had. It is however, easy to overlook some of the tings money can't buy. It can't bring loved ones back! It can't buy you true happiness or change who you are.
A wise old boatman by the name of George Squires once tried to teach me the meaning of money through these words:

Money will buy you books, but not brains!
Money will buy you medicine, but not health!
Money will buy you food, but not an appetite!
Money will buy you a bed, but not sleep!
Money will buy you a house, but not a home!

March 9, 2008

I lost out on my morning walk with Skipper this morning. I woke up at 1:50 am to listen to the boxing on the radio and didn't get back to sleep. Barbara is presently walking Skipper at Langness. It's a bad forecast for tonight though, they are talking of wind speeds of 70/80 mph with heavy rain and big tides. The last forecast said the wind would be from the Southeast, which is not as bad as it would be if they were blowing from the Southwest. Of course those of you who live in Douglas will have a different point of view.

Just 3 days to go now before the second course of chemo. I will simply be relieved now if I make it to Wednesday without picking up a cold or something. I will be sent home if I turn up there with a cold or virus of any kind so I have to be very careful over these next three days.

I guess all I have to do is sit tight and be lazy. Talking of being lazy, I have often been asked as to when I might write another book. The answer is, basically I am too lazy. Writing a blog is much easier. For one thing when you are writing a book you know that nothing you write will appear in print for at least 6 months. Also you have to be so much more careful in what you might say in a book compared to a blog. How many times have you come across people who resolve an argument by seeking the answer in a book? I have yet to hear of anyone who tried to resolve an argument by checking out a blog. That is not to say I am filling my blog with lies and my book contained nothing but the truth. I think a few white lies might be found in both. The book of course was a local publication whereas a blog has no boundaries whatsoever. Indeed there well may be someone right now reading my words on Mars. Even though my book was only sold on the Isle of Man, even that somehow made it around the world. My first contact was from a reader in Sao Palo, Brazil. I will stick to blogging for now if there is an easy way of doing something I am as lazy as the next man.

I guess we need lazy people, they always will find an easy way of doing something. If my first boss wanted a job doing quickly in his factory he would give the job to the laziest person, as according to him they would find the quickest way of doing it.

In the 1960's my dad used to empty coal boats in Castletown. Sometimes he had to work with a man who (according to Dad), when it was cold, "was too lazy to shiver". Sometimes though, the quickest way of doing something can go hopelessly wrong because of forgetfulness or stupidity.

Paddy Murray was an Irish man who came to Port Erin for work from Dublin back in the 1930's. He was brought here by a Mrs. Kelly to thatch the roof on her cottage. Mrs. Kelly also owned a fleet of rowing boats she rented out during the summer months. At the end of the summer, the boats would be collected up and brought up to the top of the harbour for the winter. Mrs. Kelly had asked Paddy to collect the rowing boats and row them to the top of the harbour. Paddy, being a resourceful Irishman, decided the quickest way to get the boats to the top of the harbour was to tie all 6 boats together. This would make a train and Paddy would only have to row the boat at the front. This was fine and Paddy set off rowing with great gusto. After several minutes Paddy had made little or no progress and was sweating like a pig, when he heard the harbour master calling out from the quay. "Paddy, your stern boat is still tied to the quay!" "Is that right", said Paddy. "Be Jasus it's a good job you were a tellin' me, for otherwise I'd have pulled the quay from under your feet."

Well that's my blog for today people; something throughout the course of today will inspire me for tomorrows. May I just finish by saying to anyone who has packed in smoking today and feels they are gasping for a smoke, just remember, it is better to be gasping for a smoke than gasping for life. No one knows this better than I do. Any kind of therapy now, is better than chemotherapy later. In three weeks time the smoking ban will have come in and I would have been joining you outside on the pavement. The trouble is, cancer beat me to it. Don't let it beat you as well. I am not a sinner turned saint; I'm still a sinner with one less sin.

March 10, 2008

I have walked through the park and wandered through Golden Meadow Mill with Barbara & Skipper. It is a beautiful sunny day and difficult to believe that yesterday I heard nothing but severe storms forecast for last night and this morning. Well last night it did blow a bit but probably no more though than Gale Force 9. Yes, that is quite a blow but nothing more than we should expect for this time of the year. Today for some reason they talk of winds reaching 60 or 70 mph instead of Force 8 or 9 or even Storm Force 10. I guess it sounds more dramatic. Listening to the radio yesterday made me think that the roof might blow off the house, the house fall down and the Island move a few miles closer to Ireland. Instead, for the first time this winter it was such a nice morning I have been able to sit out in the front garden in the morning sunshine. I hasten to add, it was the BBC that frightened the life out of me yesterday and not our friends at Ronaldsway Airport.

I am just two days away now from my second course of chemo. Cancer is very much like the weather and the doctors are very much like the weather forecasters. Two months ago the outlook for me looked pretty grim. Storm clouds were all around me and I was at risk of being blown away. Today, just like the weather, the sun is shining and not a cloud in sight. My doctors could not predict what might happen to me. None-the-less all is well so far. Sure, I am not as well as I would like to be. However, it's winter and I expect a few storms. The doctors won't get all of them right. I expect to miss some of them and sail through the rest and enjoy the warmth of the spring sunshine and yes, those long, dark and dreary winter days will be just a mere distant memory. Remember the weather forecasters and doctors try their best to warn us of what might lie ahead, but they don't always get it right and they can't accurately estimate our ability to cope.

March 11, 208

I have been awake since around 4 am. I can hear the wind howling outside. I thought I heard a curlew about 20 minutes ago. I love the sound of the curlew. A single duck is quacking its head off on the riverbank. The dawn chorus has not yet started. I have just made my first pot of tea and have decided to write today's blog.

I have been thinking during the night of the many characters I have met down through the years. Every one of them has enriched my life and so this morning I am going to share just a few of their stories with you.
It seems to me that the pub is no longer the place it once was. I seldom visit the pub now. The pub used to be a place not only with a character behind the bar but also full of characters on this side of the bar too. Pubs now appear to have become restaurants that sell beer rather than pubs that sell food. No one seems to know who the landlord is anymore. There was a time when you identified a pub by the landlord or landlady. Whatever happened to people like Mousey Christian from the Swan in Ramsey, Herbie Nelson from the Whitestone in Ballasalla and Billy Williams from the Albert in Port St. Mary? Folks like these made the pub what it was, they actually worked behind the bar and they stood out in the community. Herbie Nelson was a perfect example. His beer was so bad, it was said (albeit by Herbie himself) that folk used to travel over to the Island from Llandudno on daytrips to visit his pub and sample his beer because they could not believe it was so bad. There was not a lot of point in complaining about the state of your pint to Herbie either, as his standard reply to most complaints was. "Well you should be so lucky, you only have a pint of it, I have a bloody cellar full. "Herbie himself told this tale to me:

A certain postman in Ballasalla wandered into Herbie's pub for a pint after finishing his round at lunchtime. He called out for a pint and emptied all the change from his pocket on to the bar. Herbie was not the greatest mathematician in the

world and began counting the pennies and halfpennies, washers, bits of string and Heaven only knows what else. The postman downed his pint and headed for the door. As he passed through the door Herbie yelled after him “Oy Quirk, you are a penny short here?” “No” came the reply. “Tis you, Nelson, that is a penny short!”

Another character that used to frequent the Station hotel in Port Erin was Bluey Watterson. The story goes that one night, Bluey was making his way home after a heavy day’s session in the Station after a Rushen United win. As he wandered along the pavement with a slight wobble, the passing duty constable called out from across the road, “Drunk again Bluey!” “So am I Constable,” replied Bluey.

My Uncle Sean was a larger than life character and a publican in County Tipperary, Ireland. He had an awful temper on him but was one of the kindest men I have ever met. He was so quick witted and his mind was razor sharp. This particular saga took place in my very presence one Sunday afternoon in his pub:

The pub was empty and Uncle was not in the best of humour when two American tourists walked in to the bar and asked if they could use the toilets. “Down the corridor and last on your right” said Uncle in a clipped and grumpy Irish accent. We, that is Uncle and myself, both stood in silence at the bar awaiting the return of the two American gentlemen. I had hoped that they would simply do their business and leave, as I knew that if they came over and said thank you or whatever to Uncle before leaving, they would probably get more than they bargained for. The two Americans wandered back along the corridor, having relieved themselves, and made their way over to Uncle. I trembled as I heard one of them say. “Sir, we would like to thank you for allowing us to use your lavatory. However, if you don’t mind Sir, we would like to point out to you that there is no bolt on your lavatory door!” “Is that right?” said Uncle. “Well, I have been in this pub now for 15 years and in all that time no one ever broke in and stole a bucket of s--t yet!”

At the end of this month, the smoke will disappear from our pubs and so be it. However, it seems to me that most of the characters disappeared several years ago. I don’t miss the present day pubs. It is not just the smoke that will vanish at the end of this month; the witty and humorous landlords along with the characters that dwelled in the villages from Ballaugh to Cregneash seem to have vanished too.

March 12, 2008

I have not long returned from my second dose of chemotherapy treatment. All went well again at the hospital this morning. . I did not know that today is no smoking day until I turned on my little radio whilst plugged in to the chemo machine. When I was a smoker just a few short months ago, I loathed nonsmoking days and all the other very silly days, such as ‘bring your dog to work day’ and Heaven knows what else. I personally don't believe that national nonsmoking days work. They just put the backs up of the smokers. It’s a bit like New Year resolutions. The only New Year resolution I ever kept was when I made one never to make anymore. I believe that those smokers who really want to give it up will do so. If you don't wish to give up, that's fine and so long as you are not affecting anyone else, then you should be allowed to smoke away in peace. I don't wish to be sinner turned saint; I am still a sinner with one less sin.

Someone commented on the forum today that should they become ill through smoking, it is their business. Well all I can say to that is, being ill as a result of smoking often means lung cancer. Yes it certainly is your business. However, let me just explain exactly what that business might entail. This is not a lecture; just a simple account of what smoking did for me.

Today after two sessions of chemotherapy, I am feeling absolutely fine. I still have lung cancer and I might have it for the rest of my life, which might not be very long if chemo fails. At present things are looking very hopeful. Just a few weeks ago I would wake in the middle of the night, gasping for breath, trying desperately to administer my inhaler to gain some relief. Then the coughing would start and the pain from the pleurisy in my right side would be so great I would be wincing in agony. The pleurisy pain was like several razor blades all digging in to your ribs at the same time. The coughing would make the pain worse but of course you could not stop the coughing. You clutch the side of the bed in desperation to bring some kind of pain relief, but there is no relief. There are no pain killing pills that can give you relief from pleurisy, at least I could not find any. After an hour or so, if you are lucky, the pleurisy pain dies down, the coughing stops and your breathing returns to normal. Grab your sleep now while you can because this state will return again. The trouble is sleep doesn't come easily either. You lie there thinking about what the doctor has told you. In my case it was all about the limited treatment available to me. They can't operate on my tumour as it is too close to my vital organs. Radiotherapy is not an option for the same reason. I start to face the fact that I might not have long to live. My options are very limited. I only have chemo as an option. I sell my business to free up my time. I sell my boat because I believe I am not going to need it again. I try to get my life in order so that it will be easier for Barbara to cope when I am gone. I can't walk Skipper anymore because I get too out of breath. I lie awake wondering will I see this summer through. I worry myself sick regarding my wife. When I told my Father I might not have very much longer to live, I can hear the pain in his voice to this day. I would like to call my Mother on the phone a little more frequently than I have been but it's mostly her tears I hear when I call. I have many tears of my own too but I try to keep them to myself. Maybe in the dead of night I will let them flow. Lung cancer can be a lonely business, even if family and friends surround you. Lung cancer is not just an illness! It is horrendous, deadly and often avoidable. I have often sat out on my garden bench in the sunshine smoking my pipe and thinking I did not have a care in the world. I didn't then! It was only when I ended up sitting on my bed, struggling for breath, wracked in pain and gasping for life that I cursed the damn pipe. I have not smoked now for 5 months. The chemo is going extremely well. It looks like I am going to be given a second bite of the cherry. I don't want to nag anyone to give up smoking. It is your choice. I do want to try and make sure you know exactly what that choice is though. Lung cancer is just two little words. Two little words though that can end your life and destroy the lives of the loved ones you might leave behind. So if you get lung cancer it's not just your business. It's the business of all those who look after you and the business of all those you love and who love you. Your condition will not just affect you it will impact very severely your children, your partner, your family and friends. Yes you might be lucky and get away with smoking and live to be 100. But why be lucky? If you possibly can, give it up. It really is much better to be gasping for a smoke than gasping for life. If you feel you can't give it up, that's fine too. You might not be able to now, but that doesn't mean you will never be able too. Just because you have failed to pack it in now doesn't mean you should stop trying. If you really want to give it up you will do so eventually. Don't lose heart. I don't want to nag anyone. I simply don't want what happened to me to happen to you. I don't want to be introduced to you on the chemotherapy ward. Believe me, lung cancer ceases to be just a word for an illness when your doctor sits you down and tells you that you have it. It's a deep, dark black hole. Don't fall down it. Often there is no ladder to climb out.

March 13, 2008

I'm on my second day of my second course of chemo now. It went well yesterday, however my hair is now falling out and my skin is starting to dry up. I think I might shave all my hair off today and get it over with in one swoop. I'm not bothered about losing my hair. It will grow again and is a very small price to pay towards my recovery.

On Monday night I received a phone call from a man named Tony. He and his wife live in Derbyshire. They visited the Island 11 years ago and stayed in the Bay Hotel in Port St. Mary. At that time Barbara and I lived in Port St. Mary. Apparently Barbara and I met Tony and his wife in the Bay one night and gave them a lift back to the airport the following day. Tony is now suffering from cancer and somehow or other has come across this blog. He is not very computer savvy, in fact he has not yet perfected emailing. None-the-less he has managed to find our blog and follow my progress each day. Tony attended his first chemo session in Derbyshire yesterday. I hope it went well for you Tony and I will be calling you later. Isn't it absolutely amazing how just sitting down with a couple of total strangers, having a beer and making a simple gesture like giving them a lift to the airport remains in their memory for 11 years. It took me quite a while to figure out whom Tony and his wife were when they called and I still can't remember his wife's name. I do remember she worked in a lollypop factory though.

I also heard from my old friend Mousey Christian, the former landlord of the Swan in Ramsey yesterday. Hearing from old friends when you are battling with cancer is a real tonic. Mousey is one of those guys who are absolutely genuine. The sort who is never there to trip you up or get into your hair, so to speak, but always there when they are needed. I also heard from Gordon Lowey a former Malew footballer. What a great character Gordy is. All you Manx football followers who were supporting your teams in the 60's and 70's will remember Gordy. I swallowed many a pint after the match with Gordy and the Malew boys. The article regarding my present situation in the Examiner this week seems to have tracked down many of my old pals from years gone by. I was a bit apprehensive at first about going ahead with the article in the Examiner, however I had already started the blog and it didn't make any sense now to put a stop on any further publicity. Cancer is a disease that has been hidden away for far too long in the past. It has been an unspoken word. We have referred to it as the big 'C' and so on. If we are going to stand half a chance of conquering cancer we need to refer to it directly. Call it by its name and recognize for what it is and what it does.

I have just broken off from writing to take Skipper to the beach with Barbara. We walked from Hango Hill back to the promenade steps into a stiff Southwesterly, about Force 6. The tide is out and the lone voice of a curlew called out across the bay. Skipper's bark could be heard as he chased the gulls across the sand. So far he hasn't caught a plane or a gull, however he is still undeterred. Every plane and gull gets chased across the sand until they have flown too far out to sea and can be a threat no longer, whatever Skipper's perception of a threat is. Just like I am chasing my cancer cells away until my perception is that they too no longer pose a threat.

After three short weeks of chemotherapy I am walking on the beach again. I can hear the curlew calling out across the bay, the rising tide, and the oystercatchers and feel the sweet pure southwesterly wind blowing in from the Atlantic on my face. A few weeks ago I thought this was all behind me. Soon I will step onboard my newly acquired boat *Silverburn* and feel her gently rise and fall as she slowly makes her way across the bay. Well, it was all behind me but it's all ahead of me now. Of that I'm sure. We have now crossed that Ocean of Despair. We have rounded Cape of Hope and are now sailing across the Sea of Promise.

March 14, 2008

We have just had breakfast and tea and now Barbara will feed and tend to the 80 odd cockatiels and canaries in the aviary, let the hens out, sort out Orry, our African Grey Parrot, feed the ducks, swans and geese on the Silverburn River and then it will be Skipper's turn.

I am now in to my fourth week of chemo. I started to loose my hair yesterday and I am still shedding it today. 52 years ago at around about this time, I was loosing my eyes to cancer. Loosing my sight does not appear to have caused me too much grief and of course my sight did not and will not grow back again. So a temporary hair loss seems a very small price to pay for ridding myself of cancer yet again. There are so many occasions in my life where I have felt grateful, healthy and wealthy. Yet outwardly I guess I might have appeared to have little of these things.

I recall one night in Birmingham back in 1970. I was at engineering college and had decided to visit the pub, 'The Old house at Home' for a couple of pints one evening. The pub was about a mile from the college. With about 6 shillings in my pocket (30 pence to new comers), I set off with my white stick. Along the way I got talking to a couple of people waiting at the bus stop. They were going to bingo. As I stood chatting to them, the busy Birmingham traffic roared by, lorries, taxies, cars and busses, brakes screeching, dogs barking and folks generally scurrying about. I told the couple I was from the Isle of Man. They thought they had heard of it but were not sure. Their bus came along and I bade them goodbye. I continued my journey to the pub. As I walked I started thinking about the very nice couple. They probably got on a busy Birmingham bus each morning to go to work and did the same coming home. They had never walked along the banks of the Silverburn, never heard of Langness and walked on it's grass carpet and listened to the sky larks overhead. They had never walked on the beach late in the evening and heard the curlew calling out across Castletown Bay. They probably never would. At least I was only in this city temporarily. They say that Birmingham has more canals than Venice. Well maybe that's true, but I think you can see and touch the canals of Venice. I lived in Birmingham for two years and didn't know they had any. I arrived at 'The Old house at Home' and met up with a chap who was home on leave from the Navy. I joined him for a pint. Brilliant I thought, a man after my own heart, we will speak the same language. I was 17. Sorry about that Mr.Landlord just in case you come across this blog. Well my seaman friend was a Royal Navy man and I soon discovered we had very little in common. He didn't know what a half hitch was. He didn't know what was the beam or draught of his ship. I have know idea what his job was in the Royal Navy, but back in those days, at 17, I thought everyone that went to sea was a seaman. I wandered back to my college digs having spent my 6 shillings and considerably more than that of my Navy friend's. When I woke the next morning I was skint, hung over and in Birmingham. However, it was just another page in life's rich book. My chance meeting the night before with the couple at the bus stop taught me how lucky I was to be just visiting this noisy busy city. Yes for sure, the couple at the bus stop was probably just as happy as me. But then they knew any different. My Navy pal in the pub was probably very well versed in his job in the Navy. He had not been brought up among the boatmen of Castletown who knew their knots and terminology, could navigate and work the tides of the Irish Sea. Further more, they imparted their knowledge to a young blind kid growing up in the town who was always hanging around the harbour looking for a sail with some unsuspecting boatman. I didn't appreciate it at the time, but yes, I was indeed, wealthy, healthy and very lucky to be growing up in such a wonderful place. Even though cancer has decided to return to me again after all these years, I still feel healthy and sure that just like some of those bad memories of childhood when I had to leave home, cancer will again prove to be no more than a second bad chapter in the beautiful book life.

March 15, 2008

I don’t even bother to look at my watch anymore. What is time all about anyway? There are 24 hours in a day, and the way things are at present, it doesn’t matter how I divide them up.

We have walked Skipper along the Silverburn and had breakfast. The parrot Orry has been bathed and fed. The chickens are all out, watered and fed. The ducks, geese and swans on the river have all been attended to. Nothing has been left to nature or God. Well, not on our patch this morning anyway.

God, religion and the afterlife seem to be doing the rounds both in the media and forums at present. During these last few months I have received many emails from wonderful kind folk, some of who don’t even know me, yet they have sent me their prayers and have spent much time praying for me. In the last six months or so my situation has improved immensely. I still have a long way to go. However, within me and for whatever reasons, a normal health pattern is starting to emerge once again. How much of this is down to chemotherapy, God, or just good luck, I don’t honestly know. I don’t have blind faith or set my store in a ‘personal’ God. Why would God choose to save me or let me off the hook, whilst at the same time allow other more worthy folk than I linger through a horrible, long and drawn out death? Why would He listen to other people’s prayers on my behalf, and yet he has received none from me? Well, of course I have absolutely no idea. I only know at present I am getting better but why did it happen in the first place? Didn’t God have any control of that? Was it some kind of test? Had I done something wrong in this life or in some previous life? I don’t know, and unless God tells me I never will.

For me the trouble with religion is it’s too much like football. Everyone follows his or her own team. They often only see the virtues of their own team. Even though in many cases they are all playing the same game with more or less the same rules. I was brought up a strict Catholic in a convent school. By the age of 16, I was so confused regarding Christianity I rejected it entirely. The nuns and priests in my convent had read the same Bible as the Methodists, the born-again Christians, Baptists and all the other variations of Christianity that make up the great league of Christian premiership. Yet they had all come to a different interpretation of the same book that their church leaders tell the rest of us, carries a crystal clear message. That is to say nothing of Hindus, Muslins, Buddhists and atheists who all believe in something else. The trouble is, not everyone can be right. However, they all can be wrong. I find it totally inconceivable that, waiting up there is a Christian God or any other kind of God, who is only allowing the people of his or her own faith to pass through.

I am reminded of a story that is said to have taken place during the Falklands war. An Argentine bomb had hit one of the British ships. Many British seamen were dead and severely injured. As the navy chaplain visited the injured sailors, he came across a sailor he knew to be an atheist. As he approached the injured man, the sailor called out to the chaplain. “You know sir; there is not a great deal of difference between you and me!” “And how do you work that out?” asked the chaplain. “Well” said the sailor, “let’s suppose in the world there are at least 100 religions. You as a Christian denounce 99 of them, I as an atheist simply denounce one more than you do.”

For my sins I have given up trying to workout what might follow this life. I am certain that this is not the end though. If when you die you simply return to dust and push up other forms of life, then life itself is meaningless. I can’t imagine that anyone would go to so much trouble to create such a meaningless and pointless project. I am happy to accept whatever comes next. My God is simply ‘The Boss’. I have no idea what my next role will be whether it is up there or possibly down here. I am happy and content that I am going to the same place as you. I might not be traveling on the same road, but bear in mind there is more than one road to Douglas or London or wherever.

I leave you with the words of Desiderata. I first came across Desiderata a couple of weeks before I left the convent in 1969. I found a Braille copy of it tucked away in a small study. After 11 years of brain washing and indoctrination, I discovered quite by accident, on one sheet of paper, all I needed to know, to give me peace of mind. So far it has served me well, even through these most testing times.

Desiderata

Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence.
As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even to the dull and the ignorant, they too have their story. Avoid loud and aggressive persons, they are vexations to the spirit.

If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter; for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself. Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.

Exercise caution in your business affairs, for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals, and everywhere life is full of heroism. Be yourself. Especially, do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love, for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment it is perennial as the grass.
Take kindly to the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth.

Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.
Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be, and whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul.
With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.

Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.

By Max Ehrmann

Wouldn’t the world be a far nicer place in which to dwell if all the religions therein could learn to be neighbourly and tolerant towards each other? Isn’t that what most of them preach? But then the theory was always the easy bit. The practice is a very different matter.

Well here I am well in to my fourth week of chemotherapy. I couldn't have imagined it was going to go so well, at least so far. I have just returned from a walk up to the waterfall with Barbara and Skipper. This would have been unthinkable just a few short weeks ago. I am learning to be grateful for what now seems like small mercies, 5 or 6 weeks ago it was a struggle to get out of bed in the morning, going for a walk would have seemed like winning the lottery. I never dreamed of winning the lottery. In fact I hardly ever bought a ticket. Now I win the lottery every day. Imagine what it is like to wake up every day clutching the winning lottery ticket that is going to give you the freedom to breathe freely and unaided. Freedom to move about, talk and walk! Freedom to plan your day ahead, your week, your month, and who knows, maybe even years! If I had won money on my lottery ticket, I could choose how to spend it, who to spend it on and, how much. I could blow the whole lot in one swoop or hoard it away in a bank account until I ran out of time. By then I would have no need for it and unlike my time, I could leave it to others. However, it is time that I have. I can't spend it all in one foul swoop. I don't know how much I have won, or for how long it will last. So I need to spend it wisely. That is one of the positive things cancer teachers you. It is a great time manager.

Last spring I collected Skipper from a farm. He was a one-year-old Border Collie. He turned out to be a right little horror amongst other dogs and kids. We had to be careful and choosy where we walked him or free ran him. By the end of the summer I was looking forward to winter as this would mean I could take advantage of winter dark nights and walk Skipper on my own in Polsoun Park. I figured that once it got to 9 p.m. on a November night, the people with sight would not be wandering around Poulson Park, at least not without a torch anyway and I was right. I more or less had the park to myself and I could let Skipper off the leash to run his paws off. What I did not bargain for of course was that lung cancer would turn up and put pay to all my winter plans. By Christmas I could hardly make it to the bottom of the garden, and my winter plans regarding my nightly walks in the park with Skip lay in tatters. Fortunately towards the end of last summer, I took on Miriam (my neighbour from across the road) as an assistant to help me out with the business. Miriam proved to be a great asset in more ways than one. Her presence in the office meant that for the first time since starting the business, I was able to take Skipper out albeit on a lead during the daytime. In the end it also meant that when I became too ill to go out myself, Miriam took over these duties for me. In the end of course, I had to let the business go. However, Miriam continued and does to this day, call over on a regular basis to take Skipper out for more adventurous walks than I am able to manage. Along with husband Andy and their two children, Laura and Adam, they keep Skipper happy and busy. Skipper is much more at ease amongst children now and I am even thinking about lifting his ASBO regarding other dogs. I have just begun taking Skipper on the late night walks around Poulson Park on my own again.

Spring is just around the corner. I hope to enjoy this summer and not make too many plans for next winter. For I have learned to enjoy every moment of the present and not to take the future for granted. I have also learned you don't need to buy a lottery ticket in order to fulfill your dreams or your hopes. I now wake up each morning clutching my free lottery ticket and claim my time. Life is indeed a lottery. Bad luck and good fortune will come and go. We are in need of both. Unless you have experienced despair, you can't really ever appreciate true happiness.

March 17, 2008

I have woken feeling fine again and to quote Mohammad Ali, "I am feeling so fit these days, I make medicine look sick." Well perhaps a slight exaggeration, but I'm sure you get my drift.

Increasingly these days, it is not simply the weather or my state of health that contributes to how I feel, it is when I logon in the morning and read the ever increasing inspirational emails that have arrived over night from around the world. Some readers have said that they find the blog inspiring, especially those who are suffering from cancer now and those who hopefully have it behind them. Well let me inform you that this blog is selfish in the extreme from my point of view. I am certain that the emails and correspondence I have received since I began writing the blog, have had a profound effect on me and aided my recovery.

I am sure that Tony and Jean, who have contacted me from Derbyshire, will find strength and endurance to help them through the coming months. Tony will shortly start radiotherapy for his cancer at Christies. Tony, old soldier, it may be radiotherapy now mate, however this time next year it will be a pint in the Bay Hotel at Port St. Mary.

Elizabeth Wittmann who lives with her husband Mark, on the banks of Lake Michigan, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA is also is a former cancer soldier. Elizabeth, like me is totally blind. Since Elizabeth discovered I had cancer, she has not allowed a single day to pass without sending me a heartfelt and inspirational email.

Donna in Dublin, you and your husband and four children are also very much in my thoughts.

Anne in Birmingham, my heart goes out to you this morning. You lost your husband fighting the cancer war. All I can say to you is that his battle was not in vain. Many soldiers have to fall in battle so that the rest of us may remain standing. It is they who are the real heroes.

I have also woken up to a fantastic email this morning from Les Witherington in Brisbane South Australia. Les is also a former cancer soldier. We will hear more from Les in tomorrow's blog.

I guess receiving inspirational emails is one thing, but literally jumping onto an airplane and flying across America from Washington State, via Frankfurt, Germany, then onward to the Isle of Man is quite something else. That is what Cheryl Teeling did. I had never met Cheryl in person before. Yes, she had read my book and is friends with people in Manchester who know Barbara and I. She had contacted me after reading my book and we began exchanging emails. However, as soon as she heard there was a possibility I had cancer, she tramped the 7000 miles or so all the way to the Isle of Man. She spent a week here with us and was here the day we got the diagnosis. Thankfully she fell in love with the Island and will be joining us here again in April.

The sun is shining and I am off with Barbara and Skipper to Langness.

March 18, 2008

It's a fine day once again and I'm going to head up the Silverburn to Ballasalla and back. As I write, Orry the parrot is shouting his head off; Skipper is primed at the door and all ready to leap into action. The sun is not shining yet. However, it is not raining and the kettle has just boiled. How much more wonderful could any day be?

This coming Friday is Good Friday. When I was a kid, Easter was indeed a very special time of the year. The most

important aspect of Easter of course was coming home from school for the Easter holiday. After spending three months in the convent in Liverpool it was now time to return home to the Island once again for a far too short three-week break. But what was so special about Easter? What made the Easter holiday any different from the others? Well, I guess Easter was the beginning. It marked the end of winter. To a young child who spent his childhood crossing the Irish Sea back and forth to attend school, the end of the winter period was significant. During the winter months there was only one ferry crossing per day between the Island and Liverpool. The winter sailings meant it could be a little tricky during stormy periods in getting to and from school. When I was returning to school the winter storms came straight from Heaven. When I was trying to get home from Liverpool they came straight from Hell. None-the-less, Easter usually meant fewer storms, extra sailings and lots of chocolate.

Back in the 1960's the IOM Steam Packet had around 8 ships in their fleet. During winter they would run two and lay up the remaining 6 in dock in Birkenhead. Easter marked the beginning of the summer sailing schedules though. The laid up ships that had been mothballed in the docks at Birkenhead would now be pressed in to action. There would be afternoon and even midnight sailings from Liverpool. The port of Douglas would be transformed in to a hive of activity. Instead of the 3 p.m. arrival from Liverpool every day, ships would turn up around the clock, discharging their happy holidaying passengers from places such as Fleetwood, Belfast, Dublin, Llandudno and Ardrossan. The Steam Packet ships were a bit like the migrating birds returning to the Island from their winter havens.

Easter to me was and still is a bit like the dawn chorus. You have a long night with broken sleep. The night seems to go on forever and ever. Then, at last you hear the song thrush, then the black bird. Before long there is a cacophony of bird song out there and before you know it the dawn chorus has become a full symphony. It wasn't just the Steam Packet ships that were coming out of winter hiding that gave the place a buzz. Small boats that had been in hibernation all around the island would now be sliding down slipways and taken their berths up for the summer. Easter was special because, just like the dawn chorus, it was the beginning and all the joys of summer still lay ahead of me. As a boatman, Easter is still very special to me. Putting my boat back in to the water in late March or early April still makes my heart pound with excitement. Back in January, Easter didn't even figure in my thoughts. Cancer had struck and it seemed that boats and Easter were not going to be that significant in my life.

In January I sent an email to my loyal friend and boatman Chris. Chris has always looked after my boat and has been a loyal sailing buddy. He had laid my boat up for the winter as normal. However, the time had now arrived to bring him up to speed with my changing situation. I wrote, "Unfortunately old boy cancer has come along and scuppered our plans somewhat. The doc tells me there might not be very much that can be done for me. It might just be a question of time. A long way to go yet and we will have to see what happens. It would appear that our sailing days might be over old pal. I would like you to prepare the boat for sale and get the best price we can for her. Talk with you later Tom".
Chris did exactly as I had instructed him, and within a few days my boat Scarlet Queen had a new owner.

Today, as I write this, the sun is shining through my office window. Chris is busy preparing my newly acquired boat, *Silverburn* for the summer season. She is now painted up and fitted out all ready to slide in to the water this Easter weekend. Yes, my friends, Easter is still wonderful!

March 19, 2008

We've just returned from walking the Silverburn and never met a soul throughout our entire journey. The river is in a very gentle mood today. The lack of rain means that it is simply ambling along. The collared doves are plentiful now and there seems to be an abundance of pheasants. On the way home, I stopped off at the garage and bought some jelly fruity sweets. I am eating them now as I write. They taste like eels, very rubbery, I won't be buying anymore.

Soon the park will be full of happy kids, making the best of their Easter holiday. I said yesterday what a happy time Easter was; it was the beginning of most things. As a kid Easter was also the beginning of the money making season. There were not many opportunities for us kids to make money on the island during the winter months. Once Easter was under way, the golf links at Derbyhaven would swing in to action. My two brothers made fortunes from caddying. I did tag along with them although I have to say that demand from high profile golfers for a blind caddy was not exactly at a premium. There was however quite a lucrative market for lost golf balls. With a bit of help from my brothers and mates I seemed to acquire considerable quantities of them. As far as I know, the sign that appeared on the course read, "A golf ball is not lost until it stops rolling" was not aimed at me.

Another great summer earner was selling the programmes at the Southern agricultural show. The summer of 1967 was a particularly good summer for my younger brother and myself. I remember the year because England had won the World Cup the year before. From July on we had a fantastic time on the White City fairground, riding the horse trams and the steam train with money to burn. If any of the Southern Agricultural organizing committee happening to be following this blog, please accept my most humble apology. If the treasurer still has the accounts or the programme selling receipts for 1967, I will be more than happy to reimburse you.

A newspaper round was always a good fallback on making money. I must say though that Mr. Cannell on Arbory Street and Mr. Williams on Malew Street were not exactly enthusiastic about taking on a blind paperboy. I guess today this would be discrimination. Back then we just called it common sense. Where there is a will there is a way though, so, this is how it worked. My mates would get the job as hired paperboy then I did a sort of subcontractor's job on the round. Once my mate was clear of the shop he would hand his papers over to me. I then set off delivering the papers. The system was far from perfect and our contract was torn up long before we could perfect it. Yes for sure not everyone received the exact newspaper they had ordered and true, some received newspapers when not ordering any. Some received two or even three when I got very confused and others received none at all. Like I said, the system was not perfect and neither Mr. Cannell nor Mr. Williams was prepared to give me the time to hone my delivery skills.

When you are a kid, money is a very short-term thing. You only need enough for today. As you get older your money earning aspirations become more long term.

Last night as I listened to the news and the financial experts were predicting doom and gloom as the financial markets slumped. Billions of pounds have been wiped off the stock exchange. A couple of banks have had to be bailed out. When I switch on tonight, the market may have recovered and if not then maybe tomorrow. As I listened to all these doom and gloom merchants I pictured in my mind the boardroom of one of these large banks, men in suits, staring at their laptops and checking the time on their expensive watches. Then as they make their way home in their limos to their mansions on the outskirts of the city they will spend the rest of the night in a depressed state. The state of the money market will ensure they have nightmares. Somewhere else, probably in Africa, a family will have sat down to a bowl of rice between them in a small hut. They will have all sat round the same table. They might have checked the time by the sun's position

in the sky, likely sang a song and danced around the hut and then retired to bed, their brains not confused by the state of the money markets. Does it not make you wonder just exactly where the real happiness lies in this world?

I'm sorry, how I got to the world's financial markets and Africa from the newspaper round as a kid in Castletown, I really don't know!

March 20, 2008

Today the wind is blowing hard from the Northwest and according to the forecast it is going to increase throughout the day. Rain will arrive by lunchtime. The day is going to get steadily worse. Or is it? Do I have the power to decide what my day is going to be like? Can I change things for the better? Well probably, a few lines at the end of this blog may help you to decide.

I have spent the last 15 years of my life messing about with telephones for one reason or another. For the last 5 years I ran Island Office Minder, which provided clients with telephone lines and a telephone answering service. Before that I looked after the switchboard at the Royal bank of Scotland. Running Island Office Minder meant that I had to service many telephone lines at the same time. Of course you have to be as polite as possible to people but there are occasions when a caller simply will not shut up and you let to move on! The trick here is to cut the caller off. However, make sure before you press the button that you are the one that is talking at the time. No one will ever believe that you would cut yourself off. Thankfully the Royal Bank of Scotland never did discover most of my telephone trade secrets and I was able to deploy them later into Island Office Minder.

I began today by asking if it is possible to decide for yourself as to what kind of day you might have. Well, I am not sure just exactly how much influence we might have in what kind of life we might end up with. If anyone had ever told me that one day I would end up working for a bank I would have laughed so hard I would have been in need of hospital treatment. Before joining the bank I had worked in engineering, a fish factory and finally ended up on a log splitter.

I do recall visiting the pub on Friday evenings after work and standing at the bar, I noticed the pub used to slowly fill up with bankers. They had loads of money and I just couldn't help wondering what on earth they got up to behind those great bank doors. The answer, as I was about to find out, was not a lot! Well at least not from my experience. I don't blame them for earning lots of money and not having to do much to earn it, I did exactly the same. Joining the bank was a revelation for me. I had only ever been used to going out to work in the mornings in old clothes and returning each night dirty and tired. In the bank I would turn up at 9 a.m. in a suit, sit at my desk all day answering the telephone and generally being polite to people. Then, in the evening, I would return home having not even broken sweat. In a bank nearly everyone is a manager. If for whatever reason they can't make you a manager, never fear, they will give you a title of some kind or other. They love titles. I was a BA, a very low rank certainly. I have absolutely no idea what a BA is or was, however, I'm sure it was terribly important. In banks they have loads of meetings. They love them. They simply can't function or begin any new task without having meetings. I was forever being called away from my switchboard to attend meetings. The meetings had no relevance whatsoever to my work. I was once called to attend a meeting about Japanese Equities. A guy flew in from London especially to talk about them. He returned to London that night, leaving the bank with a telephonist who, if called upon, would be able to converse fully with anyone who wanted to trade a conversation in Japanese equities. Thankfully no one ever did.

I would be given large bonuses at the end of the month which were called performance plus. These payments I was told were for meeting my targets and for my hard work. In the fish factory, for hard work I would be given a bag of fish. I guess any place that unlocks its doors to the public every day and chains it's Biros to the counter is going to take a bit of working out.

I used to take my guide dog Escort to work with me at the bank. They were very accommodating towards him. He was allowed to roam freely throughout the bank, shedding his hairs on folk and stealing their sandwiches.

At lunchtime I used to take Escort over to St George's churchyard. Here he could run freely for a while whilst I ate my sandwiches. Escort loved to play with sticks and such. I recall one day having just let Escort loose in the churchyard and I stumbled across some plastic pipe lying on the ground. I picked up my end thinking Escort had hold of the other. For several minutes I pulled and tugged at my end. The pipe tightened several times and it did occur to me that Escort as strong as he was, didn't normally pull or tug in play with such determination. Escort was a very clever guide dog. However, up until then, he had never called out across an open space in a gruff male voice, "What the hell do you think you are doing? Put my bloody hose pipe down!"

The bank certainly was very good to me and gave me loads of money for doing very little. I just never thought I would work anywhere and be expected to do so little for so much.

I began by questioning if we could shape our day. If we had any control over what kind of day we might have. I think we do. I close with this poem that comes to me from Pam Brown, a former Castletown resident and blog reader from Middlesbrough.

Sculptor's Attitude
Author Unknown

I woke up early today, excited over all I get to do before the clock strikes midnight. I have responsibilities to fulfill today. I am important. My job is to choose what kind of day I am going to have.

Today I can complain because the weather is rainy or I can be thankful that the grass is getting watered for free.

Today I can feel sad that I don't have more money or I can be glad that my finances encourage me to plan my purchases wisely and guide me away from waste.

Today I can grumble about my health or I can rejoice that I am alive.

Today I can lament over all that my parents didn't give me when I was growing up or I can feel grateful that they allowed me to be born.

Today I can cry because roses have thorns or I can celebrate that thorns have roses.

Today I can mourn my lack of friend or I can excitedly embark upon a quest to discover new relationships.

Today I can whine because I have to go to work or I can shout for joy because I have a job to do.

Today I can complain because I have to go to school or eagerly open my mind and fill it with rich new tidbits of knowledge.

Today I can murmur dejectedly because I have to do housework or I can feel honored because the Lord has provide shelter for my mind, body and soul.

Today stretches ahead of me, waiting to be shaped. And here I am, the sculptor who gets to do the shaping.

What today will be like is up to me. I get to choose what kind of day I will have!

Have a GREAT DAY…unless you have other plans.

March 21, 2008

It's Good Friday. Well, what is good about it? I guess it will come down to me as to whether today is a Good Friday or not. If I look at it from my position 6 weeks ago, when I could hardly breathe and was heading fast down the pan and compare that to today's situation where I am 5 weeks into chemotherapy and everything looks much brighter, then today is not just Good Friday but a wonderful fabulous Friday.

So, let me now share a few of my Good Fridays of the past with you.

I recall one Easter when I was about 10. My Irish uncles from London came to stay with us. Back in 1963, Good Friday on the Isle of Man was anything but good. Well, not if you liked a drink it wasn't. All the pubs were closed. Never the less my Irish uncles managed to blag their way into getting the landlord, Herbie Nelson, of the Whitestone to open up. It was a hot sunny day and I remember a car belonging to one of my local uncles arriving at our house on Janet's Corner around 3 pm with my two Irish uncles as drunk as skunks. Uncle Louis skedaddled into the house and collapsed in a heap on or near his bed. Uncle Sean simply lay stretched out on the back seat of the car. Not having enough room to fully extend himself, he opened both rear doors, with his legs sticking out of the road side and his head sticking out of the near side, he slept peacefully for the rest of that Sunday afternoon. Because my mother (who had wasted all morning cooking lunch) made several visits to the car and commented that Uncle Sean was going to have his head chopped off by a passing car, I had deemed this to be a big enough attraction to warrant me sitting in the front seat and wait for the action to unfold. Mother called me in to the house several times. But blimey! If there was going to be an execution on the Janet's Corner housing estate there was no way I was going to miss out on it. I sat there in the front seat listening in anticipation every time I heard a car approach. Uncle Sean snored peacefully and every car glided past, carefully navigating their way round uncle's sprawling unsteady legs.

I suppose you would have to say that as far as Uncle was concerned, that was indeed a Good Friday. He had ended up lucky as he still had a pair of legs to carry him to the pub that night.

I recall another Good Friday in the late 70's, or was it? At that time I worked at Davis Charlton in Hills Meadow, Douglas. A work colleague of mine, Willie Callow of Willaston, decided to come through to Castletown to fill in time. The pubs of course were not open with it being Good Friday. The only place open as I recall was the Chinese takeaway on Arbory Street, Castletown. I don't know if we were hungry or just visited the place out of sheer boredom. Anyway having collected our meal we both set off again in Willie's mini van to God knows where. I don't know why Willie placed the portion of curried prawns between his legs. I also don't know the reason for his emergency stop just outside the Witches Mill, but I do know the lighthouse keeper on the Chicken's Rock could hear Willie's screams and yelps. His wailing cries still haunt me to this day. It may be that Willie is following this blog or perhaps one of his children. If you are one of Willie's children, you are indeed a most fortunate individual.

It's now 9.30am and shortly I will head up the Silverburn with Barbara and Skipper. We have a gale from the northwest. I am fit and healthy and, life does look so much rosier than it did a little while ago. Yes, today is a very Good Friday.

March 22, 2008

What if you were suddenly to discover that those pills you have been taking for whatever ailment were nothing more than Smarties? Well, God bless the Smarties as far as I am concerned. My little story for today did not evolve around a packet of Smarties, in this case it was water. However, the principle is exactly the same.

I seem to have spent a lot of Easters off the Island for one reason or another. Wherever I have been, something always seems to have taken place that has marked the event and etched it in my mind, which is just as well now that I have started this blog lark.

I recall such an event in the late 80's. An old Castletown seafarer, better known as Buttons Kelly, and I decided we would go and spend Easter with my Uncle Sean at his pub in Tipperary. Uncle Sean had a very short fuse and one hell of an Irish temper on him, yet he was one of the kindest men I have ever met. The pub was a sort of ram shackled old place in the town of Templemore in Tipperary. Back then; pubs were not permitted to open on Good Friday so staying in one was indeed a bonus. We drank copious amounts of ale but before Uncle retired to bed he familiarized Buttons and me with one or two house rules. Basically the most important rule was don't let anyone in under any circumstances and don't answer the door to anyone. Fine, we thought, as he slid away up the stairs clutching his gun and phone with his dog running behind him, leaving Buttons and I to remain drinking our way through the night. He always went to bed with the gun and phone and I will return to this in later blogs.

One particular evening an hour or so after uncle went to bed; a faint knock was heard at the front door. It was raining heavily and thundering. Who would be out on such a night we thought. After several knocks we gave in. Uncle was fast asleep upstairs so what the hell. Off came the chains and bolts on the door to reveal an old lady stood there in the pouring rain. "I'm after running out of holy water with all the thunder and lightening" she said. "I wondered if Sean would let me borrow some until the morning!" "Of course he will" I replied and was handed a font. I left her on the doorstep and I headed for the kitchen. Of course I didn't have a clue where he kept his holy water. Also I was unaware that Father Flynn, the local parish priest was flogging the stuff off at around a tenner a bottle to raise funds for the church. With the

font filled to the very top with good old Irish tap water, I handed it back to the old lady. "Oh begorra" she gasped, "I couldn't possibly take that much." "Take it" said I, "he has got loads of it". Well, maybe the water wasn't very holy but I'm sure it gave the old lady peace of mind as she blessed herself with it throughout the rest of the night. The following morning with the incident forgotten, Buttons and I took ourselves off and went about our business for the day. We returned to Uncle's pub at teatime to find him sitting up at the bar next to Father Flynn and in a foul mood. "Come here you to me!" he barked as we entered the bar. "Where did you get the Holy Water last night to give Mrs. Kelly?" I had not bargained for the old lady returning to thank him for the very generous helping of Holy Water. "From the tap" I replied. "I did not know where you kept it and the old lady was in need". "Right" says uncle. "We don't need your heathen pagan ways down here, you can take them back to that island of yours and keep your sinful ways to yourself." "Oh, 'tis a sin indeed from deep within the soul", gasped Father Flynn, as he choked on his very large, and of course free, measure of whiskey. "Well, Father Flynn" said I, "Why don't you take yourself off to the hills and bless the reservoir! Then, we will all have loads of the stuff at the turn of the tap". Uncle exploded and became an Irish human volcanic eruption. If I were to paraphrase the expletives that came from his mouth my blog entry would be blocked. Father Flynn hissed in general agreement as he thanked the bar maid for another very generous measure of the best Irish whiskey. To the sound of Uncle and father Flynn tutting and cursing at the bar, Buttons and I beat a hasty and safe retreat. A couple of hours later and 40 miles away in a hotel in County Offaly, we laughed ourselves silly at the events that had taken place over the last 24 hours. The next day, we returned to Uncle's pub. It was late afternoon and Uncle greeted us with a smile and plied us with as much drink as we could handle. He even laughed at the events of the night before. The two sinners and lost sheep were welcome back in to the fold. Father Flynn duly arrived for his teatime constitutional. He even granted me absolution and forgiveness in return for a large whiskey.

Back in the 1930's, my grandfather's brother, Vernon Glassey was a Methodist preacher in the parish of Malew. He once threatened to gather up all the ale and pour it into the Silverburn River. That probably explains why the hymn "Shall We Gather at the River" is a very popular in Balasalla. It also probably explains the pull of the Silverburn on us Glassey's.

March 23, 2008

In those days lies were not aided and abetted by the Internet. Of course, neither was the truth. When I hit the send key on this computer, by the time I arrive downstairs and in my armchair, this blog could be anywhere from Langness Point to Cape Horn.

Two years ago I wrote and read a eulogy at the funeral of my wonderful friend, Major Tommy Thirtle. By the time I arrived home, someone had taken the trouble to copy the eulogy down and had it up and available for people to read on the Internet. I am going to have to learn to be more careful. But of course I won't be. Just about anything you write these days can turn up anywhere, any place and travel any distance.

When working or at least being employed by the bank, during a quiet spell, I wrote a poem about the *Ben My Chree*. The *Ben My Chree* was new to the Steam Packet Company then and was getting a lot of stick for missing many of her sailings. Anyway, I took my poem down to the pub that night and gave it to the first person that asked for a copy. That person took the poem to work and printed off 100's of copies. By lunchtime the following day folks were walking along Strand Street clutching a copy. By the day after, the poem was being recited on Manx Radio. By the end of the week, it was everywhere. A cafe in Ramsey even tried to sell me a copy. The point is, it began life on a scrap piece of paper and was simply given to someone in a pub. Had that not happened, it would have ended up in my bin and never heard of again. A similar thing happened with a poem I wrote about a public toilet in Ballabeg. This time I shared my poem in Ballabeg church or was it Colby, I can't quite remember now. Anyway, I was giving one of my after dinner talks there, only on this occasion it was about 6 hours after the dinner. I recited my new Ballabeg public toilet poem. I had lit the fuse. The poem took off and sped its way to Lord only knows where. The poem turned up in various places and publications and last year I actually heard Walter Gilby reading the poem on Manx Radio from the Braide eisteddfod.

So it is with blogging. You simply never know where your blog is going to end up or who might be reading it. You just write and light the fuse. The rest of it, I have absolutely no control over. It will fly and land wherever it chooses. On the other hand, it might sink like a stone at my feet.

March 24, 2008

I am 5 weeks into chemo. I still have a little hair left and apart from my skin drying up a little, everything else seems to be normal. I am indeed very lucky and very fortunate to wake each day feeling good and in reasonable health. When I think of my situation just a few weeks ago, I was waking every day breathless and in pain. I have indeed much to be grateful for. Back then, I was tempted at one stage to ask the question, “Why me?” Then I remembered an incident that took place back in the 80's when I was in Bolton, England, training for a guide dog.

A lad had returned home from the army having lost his sight through an incident somewhere, I can't remember the exact detail. Someone from his family asked me if I would go and talk to him. I think they were looking perhaps for someone to inspire him. I went to see the chap and the one thing he kept repeating was, "Why me?" Of course I don't know why things happen to me or to anyone else. One thing I do know though is that sometimes others are so badly injured, they are not even able to ask "Why me?" I told this chap, "When you recover and feel stronger and you will, no matter how you are feeling right now, get someone to take you to a graveyard and get them to read some of the inscriptions on the gravestones to you. You will find that it is not just the elderly that are buried there. You will find people from all ages lying there, including babies. On no gravestone will you find the words, “Why Me?” You cannot be more disabled than dead".

Today I have to wrap my own knuckles and remind myself when negative thoughts come in to my head such as, “Why me?” It's me because some other poor sod probably got a much worse deal than I did.

We all thrive on hearing inspirational stories though. Through the years many different people have inspired me. This inspirational story comes from Cheryl Teeling in Washington State, on the banks of the great Columbia River. I know that Cheryl and her husband Bruce often look at the webcam, which is at the bottom of our garden overlooking the Silverburn River. Their river is two miles wide, ours is two miles long. Their country is huge; we live on a tiny island, yet we share the same world. We have the same goals and inspire each other through whatever format we have available to us. In this case inspiration came through a bald eagle called ‘Freedom’.

Freedom and I have been together 10 years this summer.
When Freedom came in she could not stand. Both wings were broken, her left wing in 4 places. She was emaciated and covered in lice. We made the decision to give her a chance at life, so I took her to the vet's office. From then on, I was

always around her. We had her in a huge dog carrier with the top off, and it was loaded up with shredded newspaper for her to lay in. I used to sit and talk to her, urging her to live, to fight; and she would lay there looking at me with those big brown eyes. We also had to tube feed her for weeks.
This went on for 4-6 weeks, and by then she still couldn't stand. It got to the point where the decision was made to euthanize her if she couldn't stand in a week. You know you don't want to cross that line between torture and rehab, and it looked like death was winning. She was going to be put down that Friday, and I was supposed to come in on that Thursday afternoon. I didn't want to go to the center that Thursday, because I couldn't bear the thought of her being euthanized; but I went anyway, and when I walked in everyone was grinning from ear to ear. I went immediately back to her dowl cage; and there she was, standing on her own, a big beautiful eagle. She was ready to live. I was just about in tears by then. That was a very good day.
We knew she could never fly, so the director asked me to glove train her. I got her used to the glove, and then to jesses, and we started doing education programs for schools in western Washington. We wound up in the newspapers, radio (believe it or not) and some TV. Miracle Pets even did a show about us.
In the spring of 2000, I was diagnosed with non-hodgkins lymphoma. I had stage 3, which is not good (one major organ plus everywhere), so I wound up doing 8 months of chemo. Lost the hair - the whole bit. I missed a lot of work. When I felt good enough, I would go to Sarvey and take Freedom out for walks. Freedom would also come to me in my dreams and help me fight the cancer. This happened time and time again.
Fast forward to November 2000, the day after Thanksgiving, I went in for my last checkup. I was told that if the cancer was not all gone after 8 rounds of chemo, then my last option was a stem cell transplant. Anyway, they did the tests; and I had to come back Monday for the results. I went in Monday, and I was told that all the cancer was gone. Yahoo!
So the first thing I did was get up to Sarvey and take the big girl out for a walk. It was misty and cold. I went to her flight and jessed her up, and we went out front to the top of the hill. I hadn't said a word to Freedom, but somehow she knew. She looked at me and wrapped both her wings around me to where I could feel them pressing in on my back (I was engulfed in eagle wings), and she touched my nose with her beak and stared into my eyes, and we just stood there like that for I don't know how long. That was a magic moment. We have been soul mates ever since she came in. This is a very special bird.
On a side note: I have had people who were sick come up to us when we are out, and Freedom has some kind of hold on them. I once had a guy who was terminal come up to us and I let him hold her. His knees just about buckled and he swore he could feel her power coarse through his body. I have so many stories like that.
I never forget the honor I have of being so close to such a magnificent spirit as Freedom's.
By Jeff Guidry

March 25, 2008

I am just back from a very wintry walk through hail and sleet. It is freezing out there and I wouldn't mind, but we got caught in another hail shower out on Langness earlier today. Most folk would say that it has been an awful day. Yet it is only the weather that has been awful. The rest of the day has been absolutely fine. Every morning I listen to the weather forecast on the radio, but the weather forecast doesn't really tell me what kind of day I am going to have. If the weather is going to be bad, I simply wear coat. No, the thing that decides in the main, what kind of day I am going to have, is the news. It is the type of stories that make it into our news bulletins that determine our quality of life.

I heard on Manx Radio's 7 a.m. main news this morning that over the Easter weekend someone stole a plant pot, which had been placed on the pavement outside a Douglas shop. A full description of the plant pot was read out in the hope that someone would recognize it and maybe return it to the shop. As a blind person, I am glad that there is at least one less plant pot to fall over in Douglas for the time being, however, that is a purely selfish point of view.

A couple of months ago I heard on one of Manx Radio's news bulletins that a man had been deported for 5 years for stealing a sandwich from a Douglas retailer. My immediate thoughts then were, what would have happened to him had he been a local! But then locals would know better than to steal our sandwiches! We must be incredibly lucky to live in a place where folks who steal sandwiches get five years deportation slapped on them and folks who steel plant pots from pavements have their crime reported on the main news bulletins.

So just exactly how safe is it living here in Castletown? I don't have any Government figures or statistics to go on. All I have is what life is like on a daily basis. I don't have chains on my doors or high tech burglar alarms installed in my house. I don't remain indoors after 7 or 8 at night for fear of going out and being mugged or harassed by drunks who are swigging from cheap bottles of cider and vomiting in the street. My wife can go to the cash machine in the middle of the town at any time of the day or night without needing an escort. Every day I walk through Poulson Park and meet children playing happily alone. From my office window I hear kids playing every day and as far as I am aware, no child has ever been kidnapped or harmed in anyway through abduction. Of course it is not perfect. My bike might get nicked and if I am really unlucky my car might even get stolen. However, I would have to be very unlucky or even careless. Yes people still fight, just as they always have done and of course just like everyone else, we have a drug problem.

As I sit here this morning though, I am five weeks in to chemotherapy for lung cancer and I am feeling good. I am being treated and looked after by a wonderful team of nurses and I am responding to the treatment. I have to say I can't imagine where in this world I might have been looked after better. I am being nursed through my illness and living out each day in a safe and secure environment. Even in the midst of lung cancer, I still wake up most mornings and just like Louis Armstrong, "I Think to Myself, What a Wonderful World."

March 26, 2008

When I was a child, sight fascinated me. I didn't understand eyesight. It was almost like my mates had two lights in their heads, but they didn't work in the dark. I remember one night when I must have been about 7 or 8 years of age, asking my playmate, "How far can you see?" After getting no response, I followed up with, "Well, can you see the stars or the moon?" "Yes", he replied. "Well then" I said, "Can you see Ballasalla?" "No" he replied. Ballasalla is a small village about 2 miles north of my home town Castletown and I remember thinking that night in my bed, "Why is it or how come, they can see things so far away like the moon, but they cant see Ballsalla?"

Many years later, I was over in the UK in Bolton, Lancashire, training for a guide dog. They used to train about eight of us at a time. During this time we would live in a hostel for about a month whilst the dogs got used to us. On occasions one of the instructors would take us out in a mini bus to spend an evening in one of the local pubs. The 8 blind students undergoing guide dog training were always very competitive regarding as to who was the blindest. They would spend a great deal of time arguing about how much sight other students had and whether they really were in need of a guide dog or not. On this occasion, Charlie had decided Colin had far too much sight and did not have need for a guide dog. As we set off one evening for our trip to the pub, Charlie and Colin took up the argument in the back of the bus. Phrases like

“Its not a bloody guide dog you need, a pair of specs would be more appropriate”, could be heard from the back of the bus. As we piled out into the car park having arrived at the pub, the argument continued. Colin unfortunately decided to comment on the glorious full moon. Charlie grabbed the opportunity that had now been handed him on a plate. “So,” said Charlie, “You can see the moon can you?” “Yes,” said Colin. “Anyone could see the moon tonight, it’s a full one.” “Right,” said Charlie. “Well the moon is over a quarter of a million miles away and anyone that can see that far don’t need no guide dog”.

Today when I think of that question I asked as a child, “How far can you see?” I wonder just how many people gaze at the stars and sometimes don’t see the ground beneath their feet.

About 30 years ago, I promised a certain person who dwells in Castletown that I would buy them a pint the next time I see them. To this day whenever we meet, he still asks, “What about that pint you promised me!” Even though I still reply, “The next time I see you!” He still mutters something like. “You say that every time!” Well, if he ever gets his pint, it won’t be just lung cancer I will be leaving in my wake.

Isn’t it strange though how when someone really excels at something, like plays really well in a football match, we call it ‘playing a blinder’? As a kid I played football along with the rest of the kids. They even put matches into the ball so that I could hear it. I was always stuck in goal though. There is nothing that keeps a defense on its toes better than having a blind goalkeeper.

Finally, this true story has haunted both myself, and Willy Kneale ever since it took place some 35 years ago. I guess it’s easy to forget your mate is blind, especially when they are sitting in the passenger seat of your works van. At that time Willy Kneale was working for Coleburn’s and had driven his vanload of televisions to Castletown. He collected me at the Duck’s Nest pub. As he tried to reverse out of the car park, he leaned over and asked me if we were OK behind. “I can see nothing Willy” I replied, thinking he was joking. The sound of the telegraph pole grinding its way through the rear of Coleburn’s van makes me cringe to this day. When I think back to my 8-year-old pay mate who couldn’t see Ballasalla from Castletown yet could see the moon and stars, he wasn’t doing so badly really. After all Willy couldn’t see a telegraph pole that was 2 yards away and I have been crashing in to things all my life with no real harm done.

March 27, 2008

Well here we are now 6 weeks in to chemotherapy and time for a little review I think. I am just back from a walk around Langness so things can't be going to badly. I feel now just as fit as I did before I knew there was anything wrong.

At the start of chemo, I could hardly walk anywhere without difficulty. Stairs were becoming a problem, doing things around the house like lifting the washing basket and other simply little tasks were difficult to perform. Now life is almost back to normal. I have hardly suffered any side effects from the chemo. I still have some hair, probably about half of it. My appetite is better than ever. In fact I am going to have to go on a diet, even in the middle of chemo. So, what do I put this down to? Who or what gets the credit? How do I bottle this recovery so that others might benefit from the formula? The trouble is there isn't a formula. It may be that my recovery is just temporary and a decline is just around the corner.

My consultant tells me that he has never known a cancer case whereby, the patient starts to feel better and the cancer gets worse. I am definitely feeling better and I am certain the cancer is disappearing. So, how did I get to where I am? I am not in any shape or form medically qualified to pass any medical advice to anyone. All I can tell you is, what I have done and what I have taken and how I have faired.

Once my cancer had been diagnosed and it had been decided that chemotherapy was the best and most effective treatment I began to take wheat grass capsules, these were introduced to me by my neighbour, Miriam. She knew about a friend in Ireland who had managed to fight off cancer 3 times and put it down or a large part of it down to wheat grass. I took the tablets every day along with a selenium-ace pill, which I am told helps you to fend off infection. I am still taking the wheat grass and selenium-ace and have done all the way through chemotherapy.

I have been told that diet is very important and plays a big part in having a successful cancer treatment. I was told to make sure I ate plenty of fruit and veg, especially through chemotherapy. I was also told to expect to loose weight whilst undergoing chemo as I would loose my appetite. Well, I have never been all that fond of fruit and veg. I have eaten only token amounts of fruit and hardly any veg. I never liked cabbage, can’t stand cauliflower and I am sure God simply had an off day or just made a mistake when he invented sprouts. So my food intake hasn't changed since I began chemotherapy.

Before chemo I use to drink 5 tins of John Smith's Best Bitter each night. I have continued drinking 5 tins per night through chemo. I visit the chippie at least twice a week for fish, chips and mushy peas. For breakfast on most days I have bacon, eggs, sausages and fried bread. Not necessarily all at once, but a combination of these things and probably all of them, or what we call a full breakfast, once a week. When I feel peckish, I am much more likely to reach for a Mars bar than a banana. The chemo has not affected my appetite one bit. Sometimes my idea of a sandwich would be a tram horse between two Ramsey bakery bread vans. I am heading fast towards 15 stone and I have never been that heavy in my life. I am not suggesting for one minute that the perfect antidote to lung cancer is 5 pints of John Smith's Bitter each night, plenty of fish and chips and fry ups, chocolate and stay away from the fruit and veg. All I know is what is. This is what I do and what I eat and this is what has happened to me.

I know that various cancer help groups and agencies from around the world now have links in to this blog. I am certainly not suggesting I have the answers to cancer or advocating my diet to anyone else. We all respond differently and our bodies have different needs and react differently to the various treatments. I suppose most medics; chemists, dieticians and health coaches would run me out of town. All I can say is I would not swap my lifestyle for theirs. I am the very proof of my own pudding, although as I have said my pudding might taste a little bitter to most folk, and my diet most disagreeable.

I am going to have to increase my walks now though in order to try and get this weight down. So, I am off now for forage along the Silverburn.

March 28, 2008

It is cold, raining and the wind is from the southeast. They are forecasting Force 8 tonight and over an inch of rain. Of course we don't always take any notice of forecasts. When I smoked, I chose to ignore them and look what happened to me. I almost got blown on to the rocks. I did eventually and hopefully not too late, change course and although we are

still sailing through choppy waters the prospects of reaching our destination are brighter. Whatever and wherever our destination is. If only I had listened to the forecasts back then regarding my smoking. I have heard the forecast for tonight so, I will take evasive action and remain tied up in the harbour.

There is an old fisherman's saying. "If you won't be guided by the rudder, you will be taught by the rocks."

This weekend, the clocks move forward. During the war, a bunch of M.P.'s started mucking about with the clocks thinking they could buy more daylight or time. As far as I know, there are still only 24 hours in each day and the hours of daylight and darkness are exactly as they were since the beginning of time. Our clocks will move forward one hour on Saturday. However, the song thrush will still beginning the dawn chorus on Sunday at the same time and the tide will still rise and fall at the same time.

Robert Kinvig, a sheep farmer used to come in to Castletown from the hills of Ronague every Tuesday to do his shopping. Before returning, he would join me, and the late Keith Collister for a pint in the Union. I recall Robert turning up one Tuesday and Keith commenting that Robert had not put his watch forward, the clocks having moved forward the previous Saturday. "Well" said Robert, "We are not to an hour or two in Ronague!" Six months later the clocks moved back again and Robert came in to town, walked up to Keith who was stood at the bar and said. "You see boy, I knew you would come round to my way of thinking eventually."

The trouble with time is, none of know how much of it we have. This makes it difficult to manage. Norman Gayle use to be the custodian at Castle Rushen. One day he was sitting on a bench in Castletown square. A couple of tourist got talking to him and after a while one of them said, "Thank you Mr. Gayle we have really enjoyed your stories. Now, tell me, have you lived here all your life?" "No" said Norman, "Well not yet!"

Sometimes the way we talk about time can lead to confusion. This is a true story that happened to me.

About 25 years ago I had become friendly with an Irish guy called Pat. He had been working over here for several months and was now going home for Christmas. I joined him for a beer or two in the Viking hotel in Castletown. As we stood at the bar having a beer, Pat went to use the public phone at the end of the bar to check on his flight to Dublin. During his conversation with the receptionist at the airport Pat was heard to ask. "Well how long does the flight take?" "Just a minute replied the receptionist? "Be Jayses, that's mighty!" replied Pat and replaced the receiver.

Some folks seem to think that life itself is a race. They spend each hour as if it might be their last. Life is not a race. Six weeks ago when I thought I was dying. I didn't spot anyone busting a gut in a last minute bid to beat me to the graveyard.

Cancer teaches you just how precious time is. I am not sure though whether I have stolen another bucket load or whether I have been given it. Whatever, I am happy to share some of it with you each day through this blog.

March 29, 2008

Today I want to begin with an apology. If you were the person walking along the Silverburn River yesterday morning minding your own business and all of a sudden some nutter came charging out from a gateway shouting "GO" and thereafter a mad loony of a Collie came charging after you, barking like mad and trying to bite your backside but couldn't because of the muzzle, I am extremely sorry.

Yesterday morning I walked Skipper alone. I walked through Poulson Park and then through the gate that leads to the field and I let Skipper go. It was early so I did not expect anyone to be around. Barbara has been playing a game with Skipper. She lets him off his lead and he sits about 50 yards ahead until he is told to go. Although Barbara was not with me, I knew that Skipper would be sitting about 50 yards up river waiting to hear the word 'go'. I shouted, "Go" and then heard the footsteps just a few yards away from me. What happened then was Skipper ran like hell in pursuit of the owner of the footsteps. I was amazed that he came back to me after only chasing you for about 40 yards or so. It must have seemed a little odd to you. I'm very sorry.

Well this weekend sees the commencement of the smoking ban. I have had experience of living and working in a smoking restricted area. It wasn't much fun then and the penalties for breaking the ban were severe. I was caught on several occasions. The nuns at St. Vincent's school for the blind in Liverpool took a very dim view of smoking. I hid my fags in all kinds of weird places. Matches were always a problem as they made too much noise and were too easily detectable by the nuns. So once I had located my fags, I then had to go to the school fence and try and cadge a light from one of the sighted kids on the other side of the fence. I have been totally blind now for 50 years and that was the only time in my life that I have ever gone looking for a light!

The nuns meted out tough punishments to us smoking kids at St. Vincent's. Ironically, it was they who inadvertently provided us with the money to buy the cigarettes. As alter boys we stole the money from the Sunday mass collections. We only stole enough to buy 10 woodbines or so and we left plenty for the other good causes.

None-the less, the pub will be a very different place come Monday. The pub used to be a place where you could go to drink pints, play darts, smoke and tell lies. No kids were allowed and the only food available was crisps and nuts. Everybody knew the landlord's name and more importantly, he knew yours. He even worked behind the bar! Yes the smoking ban will mean a much cleaner environment for everyone. However, I wonder just exactly how many that will be. If the smoking ban means that more people give up the weed, then great. It's a shame that Governments feel we have to legislate our way in to a smoke free society. It used to be that we didn't swear in front of children and ladies. We held doors open for people to pass through. We stood up on crowded buses to allow the elderly to sit and we managed to conform, without laws, to enforce these things. We called it manners and if we went back to teaching our kids manners, then maybe we would not need health policemen, snitch lines and draconian laws to replace basic manners and common sense.

Last year the forthcoming smoking ban bothered me. Now lung cancer bothers me instead!

I remember once traveling on a train from Liverpool to London. It would have been in the early 70's. I sat on the train trying to workout if I was in a smoking carriage or not. I decided the best way to discover this was to listen out for someone to strike a match. Eventually I heard what I had been waiting for. Someone a few seats in front of me struck a match so, I did like wise. A few minutes later a very official voice of a British Rail guard was standing along side me. "Would you mind putting that cigarette out Sir?" "I'm sorry", said I, "I heard someone strike a match so I thought we

must be in a smoking carriage". "Your match striking friend was put off the train in Birmingham" he retorted.
I guess I am on a train similar to that now. The guard walks up and down patrolling. He keeps chucking people off the train long before they have reached their destination. His name badge reads 'Lung Cancer'.

March 30, 2008

This is a day that will be marked in history. Not only have the clocks gone forward, but also the smoking ban has arrived in all public places. I guess there will be quite a lot of grumbling going on in bars throughout the Island at lunchtime today. Well at least the brewery will hope there is, for if not, it will mean folks have stayed away. I do find it a bit strange though, how pubs will still be able to sell cigarettes. But then I suppose chemists sell condoms but I doubt that it is legal to use them on their premises. Well for what it is worth, I shall not be enjoying a pint in my local this lunchtime. I am still deep in the chemotherapy and therefore have to avoid public places for fear of catching an infection. So, I shall be trudging my way up the Silverburn to Ballasalla and back.

We are still only halfway through the Easter holiday (that is if you are a school kid). Easter holidays were always a bit special to me as a school kid. For one thing it meant that the Steam Packet boats were now sailing more than once a day to Liverpool. This meant it was easier to get home for school holidays. No more having to stay in hotels over night waiting for the 11am boat. I would spend most of my holiday down on the quay at Castletown.

Back then the quay was a very different place than it is today. The harbour then was very much a commercial harbour. Coal, cement, gravel and timber were being shipped in to Castletown in small steamers on a regular basis. Usually, the Ramsey Steam Ship Company brought in these cargoes. They had a fleet of small steamers that were small enough to get in to places like Castletown. However, from time to time, other ships were used. One such vessel was the *Staley Bridge*.

I recall one Easter being home on holiday from St. Vincent's. I would have been about 9. I didn't really know much about football but every kid in Liverpool at my school supported a football team. Most of them supported Liverpool. I needed to find a football team to support, but no way was I going to support Liverpool, I hated the place. Well as a 9-year-old kid, I thought I hated the place. Anyway, I found myself on the quayside in Castletown as the *Staley Bridge* was unloading. I used to love to kneel on the quay and place my hands on the rails of the ship. I loved feeling the rise and fall as she lifted and then fell away with the tide. One of the crew came talking to me and I asked him what football team he supported. "Everton" he said. That was it then, I had found a football team to support. I did not know that Everton was another team from Liverpool. I returned to school and proudly boasted about my football team. There was a riot in the school playground. An Everton supporter in their midst was like placing a sparrow hawk in an aviary. I can't actually remember the exact transfer details but I think I came over to be a Liverpool supporter for 10 Player's No. 6.

Anyway, the quayside in Castletown was by far my favourite place. I would sit on the belt on (the low wall on the edge of the quay) with my hands on the rails of the ship, listening to the wagons loading coal and what have you, maneuvering just feet away from me, chains clanking, coal tubs discharging into the waiting wagons and the majestic sound of the steam winch hissing and whirling. The modern day health and safety chaps would have leaped in to the harbour and committed hari kari. There didn't seem to be many jobs worths around in those days. I wonder what jobs worth is preparing to tell passengers to put their cigarettes out on the steam train from now on. Yes of course a smoke free environment in general will be much better for all. I just don't see why we have to be so draconian about it. A few pubs where smokers can smoke if they choose to would not harm anyone who didn't visit them. My hunch is, the pub, just like the quayside, will become a place full of history, but with very little presence.

March 31, 2008

I only managed one lap of the park today with a bit of free running for Skipper along the riverbank. The 'Walk and Talk' lot comes to the park between 10 and midday. Seeing as Skipper still has an ASBO on him, I thought I had better get out of the way. I have been thinking during the night about all the mistakes I have made and mistakes made by others regarding myself.

Last November I first visited the doctors because I felt generally unwell, short of breath and so on. I was told I had something called COPD, which was something smokers often get and was told to basically to go home, take a spray and take plenty of exercise. I got worse so I went back and was sent for x-rays. After looking at the x-rays, the medics decided I had pneumonia and I was given a course of antibiotics. These didn't work either so I was sent for a CT scan. Once the doctors had analyzed the scan, it was decided that I had cancer and the rest is history. Down through the years I have often wrongly identified things.

As a blind person I often rely on touch to identify objects and I have not had 100% success. When we first got married, we lived a cottage in St. Johns. I recall making a cup of tea once whilst Barbara was out in the garden. As I placed my hand on the draining board I touched a furry object. I recoiled in horror, shouting blue murder thinking I had put my hand on a rat. "What in Heaven's name", I thought, would a rat be doing sitting perfectly still or dead on our draining board, goodness only knows. Anyway I hid under the stairs until Barbara came in from the garden and explained that the furry object on the draining board was nothing more harmless than one of her slippers, which she had reclaimed from Escort the guide dog. On another occasion while messing about in the kitchen, my hand touched a slimy object. I yelled out to Barbara that there was a bloody great slug on the draining board. The bloody great slug turned out to be nothing more sinister than a pound of sausages that Barbara had put out to defrost.

When I worked at the bank in Douglas, I used to stand outside the main doors and wait for Barbara to collect me in the car. I recall one night standing there in the company of Avril who worked with me. It was heaving with rain and I also had my guide dog Escort with me. I told Avril to go on home but she insisted on staying with me until Barbara arrived. We stood waiting in the pouring rain getting soaked. Escort was dripping rain and coated in mud. A car pulled up and Avril had the door open and Escort shoved in the back and I was hustled in to the front passenger seat before you could blink. As Escort tramped up and down on the back seat to muddy it up to the max and I sat dripping puddles of water in the front. The lady driver very politely but none-the-less frantically explained that I was in the wrong car! As I opened the door and dragged Escort over the front seat and out into the pouring rain, "Sorry", just didn't seem enough. If the lady concerned is indeed reading this blog, I am indeed extremely sorry.

This blog is fast becoming an apology for all my wrong doings. Still I guess if I can be so stupid as to think a discarded slipper might be a rat, or a pound of sausages might be a slug, then I have to forgive the doctors (whose tasks are infinitely more difficult than mine) in getting it wrong from time to time.

April 1, 2008

Well I am now just one day away from the 3rd chemotherapy course. It's on a bit of a wing and a prayer at this stage as to whether I pass the tests or not. There are a few blood tests to get through and a bit of a general health check. Even though I feel fit, you can never be sure about the blood tests.

Life does seem to be getting more and more bureaucratic these days. You can't even open a bank account now without having to show passport and utility bills. Even if you have been a customer of the same bank for 20 years and the girl behind the counter has lived next door to you all your life, you still have to prove to her who you are.

I recall an incident at Ronaldsway airport a few years ago. I was trying to pay for a flight and I was aware that there was a concessionary price for blind people so I asked how much the concession was. The lady asked me for my blind registration number. I told her I didn't have a blind registration number, I didn't even know there was such a thing. Anyway, she said, "Sorry, without your registration number we can't give you the concessionary price". I said "But I am blind, I have two glass eyes and I can take them out and plonk them on the counter if you like". She would have none of it though. If I could not give her my blind registration number then a couple of glass eyes were no substitute for this piece of red tape.

Mind you sometimes people just get the wrong end of the stick. I remember once walking along Athol Street with my white stick. I knew Barbara parked the car on Athol Street outside Zurich where she worked and I also carried a car key with me. It was one of these keys where you press the little button and you could open the car door from about 30 yards away. I used to walk along the street pressing the button on the key ring until I heard the click. As soon as I heard the click, I knew I had reached our car so; I would jump in and wait for Barbara. On this day, a kind lady had spotted me waiting for traffic to clear as I crossed Athol Street. She asked if I would like help and of course I said yes please. On reaching the other side, I thanked her and she went on her merry way. Of course to her horror, she then spotted me walking down the street, clutching my car keys and eventually jumping in a car. I also put the keys in the ignition so that I could listen to the radio while I waited for Barbara to finish work. I have absolutely know idea why she phoned Manx Radio to tell them about the so-called blind man she had just helped to cross Athol Street, who was now sitting in a car and for all she new, about to drive off in it.

Sometimes it's easy for a blind person to forget that sighted people can't manage very well in the dark. When we lived in Ramsey we returned home one night with John the Jug in tow. John Craine was a well-known character in Ramsey and throughout the Island. He was probably the best-known darts player we have ever had and was nicknamed the Jug because of all the cups he had won. He was not the shyest person that ever lived and could often be heard bellowing at the top of his voice. "I am the greatest!" Well on this particular night he did not fair to well. It must have been around 2 a.m. when he decided he had had enough to drink and it was time to go home. We lived about a quarter of a mile up the road from him so to assist him on his way I brought a torch from the drawer. As he stumbled about in the front garden cursing and swearing at bushes and walls, I decided it would be easier if I went with him. I set off ahead of him, shouting every minute or so for him to keep up. I could hear the swearing and cursing going on behind me as he bounced from hedge to hedge and falling in the gutter every 30 yards or so. On reaching his house, I stood waiting for him to catch up. He arrived panting and cursing calling me every thing under the sun. "What the heck is up with you?" I said. "You, you effin so and so" he yelled, "You have the bloody torch in your hand!" Yes, I had forgotten to hand him the torch so although he could see light at the end of the tunnel. He was having great difficulty in reaching it.

April 1, 2008

Today began just like any other day. I woke at around 4 a.m. and I noticed the birds were singing at 4:45 this morning which is the earliest so far this year. I came in to the office at around 8 am and began writing just like any other day. The phone rang at about 8:15, which was my Mother to tell me that Dad had just died. He was not feeling too good the day before and yesterday morning I called an ambulance as he had been in pain all night. I was very close to Dad and life at present seems shallow and it's going to be a long week. I don't feel like writing and I am not sure when or if I will continue. On the other hand, who knows, tomorrow the desire may well return. But that will be for tomorrow to decide. Right now I don't feel inclined to write. There are many things I could write regarding Dad. But for now I am unable to share them in a public arena. I want to thank all of you for reading my blog and for all the support you have given me. I hope to return to the blogging scene again but right now I simply cannot say when.

April 2, 2008

Well here we are, just back from chemotherapy. Yesterday I didn't know whether I would blog again and here I am already, at it again. I felt I had to write a quick blog just to thank all of you who have emailed me with your kind thoughts. You all given me so much encouragement, it is difficult to imagine not writing again. I am not sure which of my therapies is doing the most for me at present, chemotherapy or the blogging therapy.

Dad's funeral will be at 1p.m. on Saturday. A horse drawn carriage will leave Hope Street and take him to Malew church. Wife Barbara will sing The Old Rugged Cross and I will do the eulogy. Neither of us has felt up to doing it. However, we now feel we would both rather do it badly for Father than leave it to someone else. I hope to blog again soon.

April 7, 2008

There is only one way to begin this blog and that is to thank all of you who have contacted me over the last week with your kind words of support. I didn't know it was possible to have so many friends that I have never met.

This past week has been a long one, as indeed have been the last couple of months. I suppose with every storm that passes there is at least one less to blow. Anyway the purpose of restarting the blog again is so I don't dwell. I know we have to move on, and yes, we can always look back. However, we cannot linger or remain. I have often heard folk use the word closure. Sometimes a funeral is regarded as closure. However closure is not something I want to consider. I don't want to close anything. Love, memories and hope continue after funerals. It's just the physical presence that has moved on or gone.
Back in January I went to my Father and told him that my cancer was terminal and that they didn't think there was a great deal of hope. I said, "It looks like I am going before you Dad". "No" he replied, "I don't think so!" Well it seems he was right yet again.

When someone very close to you dies it does appear to stir up anger within you. The trouble is you don't know whom you are angry with. You are just angry that it has happened to you and sometimes some poor sod that just happens to be in the wrong place or say the wrong thing cops for it.

A couple of hours after hearing the news of Dad's death last Tuesday I went in to Nobles Hospital just to say farewell to Father. As I passed through the main entrance to the hospital I heard a couple of people laughing loudly in the corridor. The laughter really annoyed me. How could folk be laughing at this time? Why would they be laughing in a place full of sick or dying people? How could folk be laughing just a few yards from where my Father lay dead? Of course, I am now a regular visitor to the hospital and probably only a few days ago, I was walking along the same passageways laughing myself. Oh how your prospective of life can so easily change.

Today the kids are all going back to school after the Easter holiday. Forty odd years ago on this day I would have been making my way across the Irish Sea with Dad on the *Manx Maid*, the *Snaefell* or whatever, to Liverpool and back to school. Dad would have to rush back after dropping me at school, to catch the 3:30 sailing back to Douglas so that he could take up his night shift at the gas works.

I remember an incident in the early 60's, when Dad took me back to school. We always had to stop off at the shops in Liverpool city centre to buy some kind of toy or other as a sweetener for me going back to school. On this occasion it was a record and it was the number one record the time called 'Walking Back to Happiness'. Dad bought the record and gave it to me. When we got off the bus outside the school gates I gave the record back to Father. I was not going to see home again now for three months and the convents gates did not seem like happiness. I told him, "You take this record home with you Dad as it is you that is walking back to happiness". I have reflected on that incident this last week. If it were at all possible I would hand the record back to him again now in the profound hope that this time he really has just walked into happiness. However, just as those bloody great convent doors closed between us all those years ago, so it is that even bigger sturdier doors appear to have closed this time. Back then it was for three months. This time, only the Boss knows.

April 8, 2008

Another day has arrived. Exactly one week ago today, at this precise time I was sat in this office doing exactly the same thing. I was writing the blog when the phone rang to tell me of my Father's death. That changed everything that day. However, it began just like any other day as this one has. I suppose it goes to show whatever plans we think we might have, we only play a very minor roll. The Boss or whoever is up there in charge will pull all the strings.

Signs of spring are all around us. The cows have been turned out and are now grazing along the banks of the Silverburn. This means I have to be a bit more selective regarding my walks with Skipper along the Silverburn. Yesterday Barbara saw her first swallow and on Saturday Chris put the new boat ‘Silverburn’ in the water.

Last summer Dad came fishing with us for the first time since I owned a boat. He caught his first fish ever last August. He enjoyed it so much I was sure he would have been a regular with us this year.

As I write, Orry the parrot is singing his head off down stairs. He can now call Skipper by name and he also belts out the first couple of lines of The Entertainer, The Woody Woodpecker song and Laurel and Hardy. While this is going on, Skipper is bounding up and down the stairs trying to tell me it’s time for a walk. There is not much time to dwell on anything for long when you have animals around you. The blog, just like the animals has become something else to attend too on a daily basis. Last week I wondered if I would return to it and just as when tragedy strikes you don't stop feeding and looking after the animals, so it is with the blog. Your emails and support over the last week have kept me going. I have never lived without animals being around me and right now I can't imagine not coming into this office each morning and writing.
I am now about to head off up the Silverburn with Skipper. It's a pleasant calm morning, my spirit is lifted a little and I have a thirst for life again. Father will never be out of my thoughts and we will return to stories involving Dad in the future. However, in order to bring closure to the events of Saturday, I close with the poem I read out at the end of his eulogy.

Do not cry, despair or weep.
I am at peace, and merely sleep.
I have not gone, so do not fear.
I love you still, I am still here.
You cannot reach, but I am near.
I can see, I am still here.
So talk to me and call my name.
I am still here, it's just the same.
It’s only bones before you lie.
My spirit's free, it did not die.
Beside me there's an empty space.
Until you come and take your place.

April 9, 2008

I have just returned from walking two laps of Poulson Park with Skipper. In about half an hour I will take a wander down through Golden Meadow Mill. I have woken up feeling better today. I have started to feel a bit breathless over the last three days or so and was getting a bit worried that the cancer might be returning. I started taking antibiotics yesterday and I do feel better this morning so hopefully we have had no more than a chest infection.

It is a lovely spring morning today and I am grateful that I am able to enjoy it. An old family friend called me this morning and told he has decided to retire. He is one of those people you think will never retire, just like my Dad who was still working at 80. My Dad's sudden death has made our friend think a little more deeply about life and I guess not to take things for granted. Better to enter into retirement with a little health than none at all. How many times have you said to yourself, "What would we do without so and so?" or, "We just couldn't manage without him or her"? I have many times and of course on each occasion I have been wrong. The graveyards are indeed full of people the world thought it could not do without and no doubt cradles are full of emerging indispensables. Mind you its not just people that sometimes appears to be indispensable, places can seem like that too.

I have just walked round Poulson Park. The sun shone all the way round and there was only me in the park. Shortly I will

walk through the old Mill. The walk will be peaceful and idyllic. I have often woken up in some grotty places. Many folks have woken up in large cities this morning, stumbled out of bed and jumped on a bus or train and staggered into work in some grinding factory or stuffy office. They will do like wise this evening. They won't even see the sun go down. I'm sure they won't be unhappy, as they don't know any different. I was lucky enough to be born in a beautiful place. I can walk in perfect safety all day. Sure I have had a few setbacks lately, however, when you look at the whole package, life has not been too bad to me.

All of us on this Island are only a heartbeat away from a riverbank, a meadow, a field or a beach. On last night's Drive Programme on Radio 5 Live, I was listening to a guy whose job was collecting needles, syringes and, other rubbish from the banks of the River Trent in Nottingham. I have just returned from a walk along the Silverburn and had I collected rubbish, I would have had enough space in the turn up of my trousers. I leave you today with a poem. I always hated being away from home, however having to leave home at least meant that I experienced the joy of returning.

This poem is called ‘The City Clerk’. It was handed to Tommy Mylchreest on Castletown square back in the 1930's. A man approached him, handed him the poem and disappeared. We do not know who he was or is but I guess he was the City Clerk himself.

THE CITY CLERK

The wind sings in the city, he breathes the breath of home.
Bright spray from the Atlantic, he blew beside my home.
Still sunshine on blue harbours, green glens and flowing streams.
I see them in my ledgers, I hear them in my dreams.

The lazy Island hay-carts, with sway top-heavy loads.
The crimson Fushias cringing, on the dusty Island roads.
The cushag and the Daisy, and the cloudless Island sky.
All these I shall remember until the day I die.

The wind sings in the city, oh how the spring is fair.
From Andreas to Bradda, from Colby to Lezayre.
And how the gorse seems golden, on a summer's afternoon.
The done moth in the twilight and the round red Island bloom.

And how the sea in autumn, is sparkled by the breeze.
And young loves go a courting, between the rowan trees.
He sings a song of beauty, in everybody's ear.
But only I remember, and only I can hear.

The wind sings in the city, the west wind from the sea.
Come home again he's singing, come home again with me.
Langness has still its heather, and Peel its fishing fleet.
Why stay a moment longer, in this drab city street.

There's beauty for the asking, there's laughter and there's friends.
Romance that comes and lingers, and love that never ends.
The cushag and the daisies, and the gentle Island rain.
They're waiting, oh how they're waiting, for you to come again.

April 10, 2008

There is a touch of rain in the air this morning. I have managed to get a 45-minute walk in without Skipper chasing anyone or harassing any other dogs. Mind you he still has his ASBO in place and I have to get up earlier and earlier to get my walks in before the rest of the dog community on the island join me.

Today is going to be busy. We still have an aunt over from Dublin for Dad’s funeral. I have promised to take her out later this morning. This afternoon our good friend Cheryl Teeling, whom I have referred to many times on the blog, will arrive at Ronaldsway Airport all the way from the banks of the Columbia River in Northwest USA. Other good friends will accompany her from Manchester, Pauline and Colin Chapman.

Yesterday I took a gander over to Port St Mary to check on a project. Ray Gregeen is building me a model of a Mississippi paddle steamer. It is coming on well, but is still several months away from completion.

Barbara has just brought me one of my special Tassimo coffees and now after a couple of mouthfuls I am fully charged to continue with the blog.

I was wandering down Arbory Street in Castletown the other day and I dropped in to Diane’s little gift shop. Diane is the daughter of the late and well-known Castletown character, Keith Collister. I wanted a few Manx items such as Manx cat, Three Legs of Man and that type of thing to send to a blind lady in the U.S. and there is no better place than Diane’s. There was a time over here when the shopkeeper, Holmes the baker, Collister the grocer, and so on identified all the local shops. Thankfully Diane’s shop is one of the few that’s left and is still very much identified with Diane. Let’s hope that Tesco’s doesn’t one day express an interest in ornamental Manx cats or models of the Laxey wheel.

Diane’s dad, Keith was of course, a very good friend of mine, as he was to most of the folk of Castletown. I could easily write a blog dedicated just Keith’s stories alone. I have already referred to some of his yarns in earlier blogs and no doubt we will do so in future ones. This particular event took place in the Union hotel about 20 years ago.

Keith along with the regulars sat watching a talent show on the telly. “I quite fancy that opera singer,” says Keith. “Not a chance in Hell” was the general consensus of the rest. “OK, I will take a fiver from anyone that reckons she won’t win.” said Keith. Of course the opera singer won the talent show and Keith pocketed around £50. An hour or so later a football match between Liverpool and a team from the continent came on the TV. “OK boys, this is your chance to win your money back, I say a fiver Liverpool wins the match!” “Now just hang on a minute Keith,” said the spokesman, “This match was played last night; we’re not that bloody stupid!” “Oh, sorry” replied Keith. “The talent competition was last week!”

I'm just back from morning walk. It's raining and I never met a soul on my wanderings. I was really hoping to take my boat *Silverburn* out on her sea trials later this afternoon, however, those nasty men at Ronaldsway have forecast the wind will go round to the southwest and increase to about Force 5 which will mean we put off our sea trials until tomorrow.

Listening to the radio this morning I hear that the 45 million Pound extension to the runway at Ronaldsway is going ahead. It seems that this extension is being built for no other reason other than to comply and bring Ronaldsway in to line with EEC standards on Runways. Yes, that exclusive club that we are not a member of, are at it again and even though we don't have a membership card, it seems that Tynwald members appear to have given the doormen in Brussels the slip. Still, I guess it is comforting to know that in the unlikely event, passengers wishing to fly direct from New York to the IOM, will be able to do so. I suppose its only a question of time before the Harbour Board are instructed to lengthen the Victoria Pier by about half a mile, just in case the QE2 decides to drop in on us one day. Are we about to be told that Castletown football stadium also does not comply with the latest UEFA regulations and therefore it must be extended to a 50,000 all seater capacity facility just in case UEFA ever decide they want to play one of their cup finals there? Well should the European Cup final ever be played at Castletown, at least we will be able to fly the fans in with jumbo jets or sail them across from Liverpool onboard luxury liners. That is of course providing all the cabins are not taken up by the Euro bureaucrats.

A few years ago, I wrote a poem about the building of a public toilet in Ballabeg. The poem was written tongue in cheek. However, many a true word has been spoken in jest and the poem has never been more apt than today.

From Meary Veg to Thie Veg

Now the folks of Ballabeg drink an awful lot of tea,
But they never have been able to have a public pee,
So the Commissioners decided they would see what they could do,
To keep the people happy they would build a public loo.

Now the job they had in mind, in a simple quiet location,
Was just a little hut, with a toilet and wash-basin,
So they put it out to tender to obtain the lowest bid,
And from Dan Kinvig they got a quote, of around three hundred quid.

Now Dan's bid was accepted and the work it soon commenced,
But Tynwald got to hear of it and rather took offence,
Its seems they found a problem with the planning application,
And the loo did not comply with all the modern regulations.

So the Commissioners handed over, to the MHK'S.
Who promptly decided the project must be phased.
So Dan Kinvig was summoned and told to sod off home.
And consultants and lawyers, from London in were flown.

Now the consultants did a survey and from that they did decree.
To comply with project Iris they would need a lot more pee.
So new plans were instigated and the draft was soon made final.
To make it EEC compliant and build a larger grand urinal.

So surveyors came from England and structural engineers.
Lunatics and odd balls with all their daft ideas.
They submitted their quotation, then ran away and hid.
As their estimate reached Tynwald, for sixty million quid.

That's fine of course said Tynwald, its well within our budget.
And even if it wasn't, one of us would fudge it.
The plans were duly passed and commissioners were heard to cry.
"We didn't want a toilet, 14 stories high."

But Tynwald was unmoved and set about the job.
Of building in the village a multi storied bog.
A building firm was sought, the size of the Armada.
And a contract was drawn up and awarded to Dandara.

Petitions started raining in, for there was much disquiet.
And the quiet folk of Ballabeg rose up and caused a riot.
The MHK'S held meetings to think the matter through.
And decided it was best if Douglas got the loo.

So new plans they were drawn and more consultants gathered.
And to the sixty million quid, several naughts were added.
But Douglas didn't want it, they said they would get by.
*They didn't need a ****house, not 14 stories high.*

Now 50 years past by, and not a brick's been laid,
The MHK'S still meet and the consultants still get paid.
The MHK'S are busy, we know not what they'll do.
And the folks of Ballabeg, they got a cheaper loo.

For a hut was built by Dan Kinvig for the folk of Ballabeg.
At the bottom of his garden, they've got a nice Thie Veg.

He didn't use consultants, to build his little loo.
Or spend sixty million quid, just a trip to B and Q.

April 12, 2008

It isn't a bad day today. I was hoping for the wind to have died away as I would like to take my boat *Silverburn* out on her maiden voyage this afternoon. Thankfully that is the case, so later we will circumnavigate Castletown Bay several times. This is because I think there might be around 10 passengers and I only have life jackets for 5 or 6, so I will do it in relays.

Dad is very much in my mind today, as he usually called on Saturday lunchtime. At 12 o'clock it would be nice if I could do what the Government does and simply put the clocks forward by an hour. Still that does not help their cause and would not help mine either.

Well, I have just been listening to the radio and to some of the competitors who will be taking part in the London Marathon tomorrow. I have never represented my country in anything. It must be a truly wonderful feeling. I suppose I sort of represent my country with this blog, in as much as I communicate with folks from various parts of the world. At this point, let me welcome to the blog, Simon in Sweden who called me yesterday. You will get the hang of this thing as we go Simon.

Well as I was saying, I have never represented my country although I very nearly did once, back in the 1970's. The Isle of Man dart team entered a team in the British County League. It worked like this, for each of the home matches, we picked our best players and consequently we won most of the matches. The away side usually turned up too drunk after spending all day in the Douglas pubs. However, the away matches were a different kettle of fish altogether. Most of our good players could not afford the fare so the team was selected more on the basis of who could afford the trip rather than how good they were. On one occasion we even persuaded the bus driver to play for us even though he said he had never thrown a dart in anger in his life.

We all wore blazers with the IOM badge sewn on the lapel. I say we, because I was part of the team. I was considered as one of the team simply because I was the only away supporter. On one occasion we were playing against Warwickshire in Birmingham. It was decided that I should line up with the team in the passageway that lead on to the stage. The IOM team was on one side of the corridor and the Warwickshire team lined up on the other side. I lined up with our team sporting my blazer and badge with my hand on the shoulder of one of our players who was also acting as my guide. As we waited to be called onto the stage to be introduced to the spectators, I clearly heard one of the Warwickshire players saying to one of his teammates, "Blimey mate, we should beat this IOM team easily enough, one of them is bloody blind!"

Well of course, he was right, however the reason we went on to loose the match was not because we had a blind supporter it was simply because the team had been on the beer all day and probably would have lost to the blind school anyway.

April 13, 2008

It is actually 8:05 p.m. on Saturday night. I have just opened my first tin of John Smith's as we draw to the end of a good day. We took my boat *Silverburn* out on sea trials this afternoon and managed two circumnavigations of Castletown Bay. The wind was from the Northwest, blowing at about Force 5 with sea conditions slightly choppy. *Silverburn* performed with flying colours and rode the waves nicely, shipped a little bit of spray but only managed a top speed of 6 knots with 5 people onboard. None-the-less I am very happy with her performance. Sunday we will leave Castletown at 3 p.m. and sail to Port St.Mary, calling in at the Albert for an hour before we sail back.

Ray Cregeen from Port St.Mary will accompany us on *Silverburn* to Port St Mary and back. The man is a human storybook, so hopefully I will have a boatloadf of stories for next week. Everyone from Manchester and Cheryl from the US, have legged it to Peel tonight to see or hear Dicky Kelly entertain in the Creek. This means I am more or less alone apart from Barbara, Orry the parrot, Skipper and Chris dropping in and out. I am about to take Skipper for a wander around Poulson Park.

Well, it's now 5.10 a.m. on Sunday morning. I have been awake since 3 a.m. It appears to be a fine day. The dawn chorus began at 4:30. I am about to make my second cup of tea. Soon I will walk Skipper and the highlight of my day will be this afternoon's sailing trip with brother Lenny, young Chris Callow, my boatman and Ray Cregeen to Port St Mary. It is going to be a good day, that is, unless The Boss knows better or has something else in mind.

Question: If I pray or if other folk pray so that I get relief from my cancer, this may be granted. If on the other hand, I pray or ask for good weather to go sailing, this may well be turned down. I wonder why that should be?

April 14, 2008

I only managed a quick walk with Skipper today so far. I have got to head for Peel this morning to buy fish for wild birds and then onto the hospital for an appointment for Barbara.

We didn't manage to get to Port St. Mary in the boat yesterday as we broke down twice in Castletown Bay. The first time, she broke down just outside the harbour. The engine just slowly died away and then cut out. We got the outboard going and headed back into harbour. The main engine restarted and after about 10 minutes showed no sign of any problem so we headed out to sea again. The second time she broke down we were at the buoy. We started up the outboard and headed back into the harbour with the trip to PSM now abandoned. Ah well! We will try to discover what a problem is throughout the week and try again I guess.

Oh yes, before I forget, I said I have only managed a short walk with Skipper this morning but did not tell you why. It is because I have been chased out of the park by a tractor, which is now cutting the grass. I cannot return to the park now until at least lunchtime due to it being Monday and it is 'Walk and Talk' day. I'm not quite sure what 'Walk and Talk' is all about, however, it seems that folk meet in the park and they all walk round and round, talking as they go, about what though, I haven't a clue. Anyway Skipper still has his ASBO so letting his loose among a load of Walk and Talkers would be utterly disastrous.

I am told that today we will reach 5000 hits on the blog since we started it in February. Today is the 51st blog so that means around 100 blog readers log on each day.

I have also begun today by putting myself on a diet. I have had an apple and a banana for breakfast. The trouble is I have to go to Peel at lunchtime so how the heck am I supposed to go to Peel and not call at the chippie? That is like taking someone who has packed in smoking for a trip around a tobacco factory. For the benefit of our off Island readers, Peel has two fish and chip shops which serve up the best fish and chips on the Island. Well, along with the van that comes to Castletown. That is, unless any of you know better of course.

April 15, 2008

I am just back from my morning wanderings along the banks of the Silverburn. I didn't meet a soul this morning. The sun is shining and there is a gentle breeze from the southwest. Tonight I am hoping to take my boat *Silverburn* out to sea, to test out our seemingly dodgy engine. I have young Chris on standby and we shall sail at about 6:30. If you hear my name and lifeboats read out in the same sentence on Manx radio's Morning News tomorrow, there will be no blog.

I have received a couple of emails asking how Skipper got his ASBO. Basically, Skipper can be hell on paws. When we first got him, his hit list regarding things to chase consisted of planes, bikes, prams, cars and people or walkers who did not have dogs. Well now the list is down to planes and people without dogs. Only when he stops chasing everything, will the ASBO be lifted. The ASBO means that most of the time he has to remain on a long lead and only when there is no one else about, is he let loose. If you were to meet him at home you would swear that butter would not melt in his mouth. However, the same dog let loose in a park full of kids becomes a pain in the proverbial.
Now then, I know that you are all wondering did I succumb to the temptation of the Peel chippie yesterday? Well, I really tried very hard to talk myself in to settling for a sandwich at Shoprite and I briefly flirted with the idea of dropping in to Muffin's pie shop but in the end the lure of the chippie proved to be too great and my willpower sank to my boots as the smell from the chippie on the quay filled my nostrils and like a GPS system, guided me to its door. I will return to Peel next Monday and have a second stab at it. In the meantime I will checkout the local chemist to see if there are any patches or chewing gum you can take prior to visiting Peel.

April 16, 2008

I woke up to the sound of the dawn chorus at 4:30 this morning. The birds were at it in full swing. The sweet morning air perfumed by the meadow and seasoned by the salt from Castletown Bay, wafted in through my bedroom window. For about 30 seconds I felt on top of the world. Then thoughts of my father came flooding in to my mind and the smell of the chemotherapy filled my nose. For a brief period I had forgotten all about Father's recent death and of course the cancer. I tried to shrug off both these events but could feel tears welling in my eyes. I checked my watch again and it read 4:40. I started thinking about work, but then remembered I had none. With my mind full now of negative thoughts, cancer, Dad's death and no work or business to run, I drifted back to sleep again. I woke again at 7 a.m., but this time there was no false dawn. The birds were still singing and the air was just as sweet. Yes, of course I was just as aware of Dad's death and my cancer. I had simply woken in a much better and more positive frame of mind. After a mug of tea and a brief listen to the morning news, just to make sure that World War 3 had not broken out over night, I dressed and within a few minutes I was walking along the banks of the Silverburn with Skipper. I took the cattle bridge from Poulson Park and wandered down through Golden Meadow Mill then into the Mill field and eventually out through the gate that leads to the Old Mill, back down the road and home in time for bacon and eggs. Yes, I know I should have had a banana, I even forgot about the damn diet. It's a good job I did not start writing at 4:30 this morning as my blog would have read very differently than it does now. What a difference a couple of hours can make to your presence of mind and how you wake in the morning can, and often is I'm sure, a determining factor in how you embrace the day.

Well, last night young Chris Callow and I took my boat 'Silverburn' out again. Of course we broke down again. Twice in fact and had to return to the harbour using the outboard engine. Hopefully our new fuel pump will arrive today. Chris will fit it probably tonight and we shall try again tomorrow.

I have an appointment with the cancer specialist at Nobles tomorrow. Next week is chemo week and Barbara has an appointment with the chest consultant, so all in all, a big week medically is coming up.

At the beginning of this blog, I said I had got off to a bad start to the day. It's impossible to be positive all the time. Sometimes negative thoughts are necessary. In order to have a balanced mind, you need both negative and positive thoughts. During those down periods it's easy to start letting things go. Why bother doing this or that? Sometimes we don't realize that the little things we do each day can and do make such a difference to other people's lives. With just a little effort, you can indeed have a profound effect on others.

When I came into this office yesterday and read this email from Les and Margaret Witherington in North Australia, any thoughts I ever harboured of packing in the blog went right out of the window. I am of course extremely humbled by them and totally unworthy of their comments. However, I share their thoughts with you simply to demonstrate my point on just what little time and effort we have to make in order to have such a profound effect on other people.

Hello Tom,
Do you know how much effect that you have on others? I grew up in the sanctity of a 'normal' working class family in what is now a suburb of Greater London. At the tender age of 17, (some 43 years ago) I decided fly the nest and move to the other side of the world and in those days that was quite a decision. consequently, from that time onward I have always looked to myself for help and inspiration and not rely on others. I never had childhood heroes or really had anyone to model myself against. I have read numerous autobiographical books but they meant nothing.
In 2006, I was on my third visit to the Isle of Man. I was looking through the bookshop at Ronaldsway Airport when I came upon the book "Who's afraid of the dark" I had heard of this book and thought that it might be alright for a bit of a read on the way back to Australia. By the time we boarded the plane at Heathrow I had finished the book and was captivated by your story. When we arrived home I endeavored to find out more about this inspirational man. I even read the book again. When I first came across your blog, I think you were about a week into it, I was devastated by your situation but it became compulsive reading and each time that you have a good day I am pleased and happy for you.
I, like you, love the Isle of Man and feel privileged to have had several visits there and am thrilled when you talk about a place that I know about or have visited and I thank you for bringing back such happy memories. At the end of this week we are going on holiday and I will not be able to have my daily fix of Tom Glassey so until we return home again in about three weeks I wish you well and hope that you continue to regain your strength and I thank you for being the sort of person that I would be proud to be.

Kindest regards
Les Witherington
Brisbane. Queensland

So today, stop off and pick that bunch of flowers, make that phone call or write that letter. It will only take you a moment and cost you hardly anything. It will make someone else feel like a millionaire. You do that and I will carry on blogging.

April 17, 2008

I have a busy day today. I have got to be at the hospital for 2.45 pm. as the consultant flies in from Liverpool for the day. He is going to tell me how well, or not so well, I am doing regarding my cancer or possibly, and more likely, I will tell him.

My Mother also has to fly out to Liverpool for the day to have laser treatment on her eyes and she will be back tonight. God bless Liverpool I say. It seems it isn't only the football team we have to thank for entertainment, but their doctors, consultants and medical facilities that we all avail of from time to time.

Every family has its rock that always steps up to be counted when needed. Well in our case that person is my cousin Lynda, daughter of my Uncle Willie. Uncle Willie, Dad's brother, died a few years ago from cancer. He was one of the most happy-go-lucky people I have ever known. He was always either whistling or singing a song as he went about his daily business. He never gave straight answers to any questions. There would always be a joke or a twist to every tail. If you asked him if he took sugar, his standard answer would be. "Yes two please, dropped from approximately 3 inches and stirred anticlockwise". His daughter Lynda has accompanied Mother today to Liverpool for her laser treatment, as she has done in the past and probably will do in the future. She is forever running around doing things for the older members of the family and at the same time bringing up her own kids. God bless Lynda! I say 'God Bless' because 'Boss Bless' doesn't quite sound right.

April 18, 2008

Yesterday I had an appointment with cancer consultant. He seemed pleased with my progress, but not surprised. I see him again in four weeks time, after the CT scan. He is talking of the possibility of me having to attend Clatterbridge for around 3 weeks for radiotherapy as an outpatient. We now have to think about where we might stay on the Wirral. I guess if we could rent a cottage, this would be the best option however; there are other problems such as, what we do about Skipper? Well I guess all will be resolved one way or the other.

Barbara now has her appointment with consultant on Tuesday regarding her chest condition, and on Wednesday I have my last chemotherapy course, so it will be a busy hospital week next week.

Well, can I now apologize to our US readers? Unfortunately I am not able to reply to any of your emails. I am receiving yours but every time I reply, the email is returned to me as undeliverable. I have no idea why this should be other than the US Mail servers appear to think I am spam! Hopefully it will be resolved soon.

At present, I am getting a small insight as to what it might be like to live in China. I gather that some firms have now blocked access to the blog from office PC'S. Well I guess I should take this as a compliment. Still, I wonder, is the block because the bosses are afraid of what their staff might read on the blog or is it simply because they are bored with their jobs? Having spent 11 years in an office, I am fairly certain it's the latter.
You will all be pleased to note that my diet is going very well. Yesterday I had a bacon and sausage bap at the airport for breakfast and last night my brother Lenny brought me fish and chips from the van. I have only had fish and chips twice so far this week. Mind you, the sweetie shop (Memory Lane) on Arbory Street, delivered a full jar of sweets to my front door. Apart from that, the diet is going very well.

April 19. 2008

I have just had a sausage breakfast. The chemotherapy has ganged up and joined forces with the dieticians. Yesterday mouth ulcers made eating difficult however; they don't seem to be too bad today. I have had a sore throat though since my last chemo session, but I have woken up today more or less free of ulcers and the sore throat. It seems all the predicted side effects of chemo have saved themselves for the last couple of sessions. Well, just one more to go now.

My emails are still being blocked to the U.S. It appears that Manx Telecom has upset the Americans by bombarding them with span messages and so the US has responded by blocking all of Manx.net emails. Hopefully I will resolve this later today by using a different email address. So U.S. blog readers, your peace is almost over. You have had three days now of respite from me. Your tranquility is about to be shattered.

Today we have a stiff northeasterly wind, about Force 5 or 6. Young Chris, my boatman was supposed to be bringing a boat back from Ramsey today. However, the trip has been put off until tomorrow, maybe!

I am now trying to get used to my new mobile phone. I had the old one for 5 years before I finally sorted that, so not much hope for the new one. I have just about got this texting lark sorted.

Well, it's a short blog this morning as I am running late. I have to take Skipper out now and get back in time for football, Arsenal v Reading at lunchtime. There is also bound to be a match on at teatime. Then I must make sure I wake up at 3 am tomorrow morning for the boxing. I also hope to have my boat *Silverburn* sea-worthy again by teatime. Chris is fitting the new fuel pump as I write.

April 20, 2008

It is 10 am on Sunday morning and so far I haven't been outside the door. I didn't sleep much last night so I'm feeling a bit on the tired side. I shall walk Skipper shortly and then probably fall asleep for an hour or so.

In the small hours of the morning, I heard on the radio that the city of Liverpool is twinned with Barcelona. I wonder just what the point of this twinning caper is all about. Does anyone make any money out of it? Maybe we could twin strategic places around the Island with other glamorous focal points around the world. For example, we could twin the Point of Ayre with Cape Horn, Castletown Bay with the Gulf of Mexico and Peel Bay with the Mediterranean. It might bring tourists flocking to our shores, but on the other hand, I guess most of them would end up wanting their money back.

Isn’t this twinning lark just another load of spin by the politicians? I’m sure the Scousers don’t feel as if they have anything more in common with the people of Barcelona as a result of being twinned.

Mind you the politicians are not the only masters of spin. I once sat in a café in London and heard a customer complaining that the milk in her coffee was sour. “Sour” said the proprietor. “I will have you know madam, that an hour ago, this milk was grass!”

Some years ago, I worked briefly selling junk on the markets. I recall one day at Rushen Abbey, a cockney was selling cheap teapots and jugs next to me. His banter went along these lines. “Blimey Madam, only last week I saw this very same vase on sale at Sotheby’s for 600 knicker, that vase was over 200 years old. Mine is only £2.99 and it is brand spanking new!”

I suppose we all use spin from time to time though. Doctors tell us things could be worse when they are almost hammering the nails in to your coffin lid. We tell ourselves that horrible tasting medicine is really very nice in order to get it down our throats, or our children’s throats. We tell our friends they don’t look a day over 60 when they are looking a little haggard at 75.

Sometimes we need a bit of spin though. It’s not a particularly nice day today. I am telling myself now that it is a nice spring day, so that I will jump up and take Skipper for his morning walk. If I set off with thoughts of a nice day in my head, then it will be an enjoyable walk, for it is not just the weather that decides the quality of the day.

When I was fist diagnosed with cancer, I did not appreciate the spin from doctors and friends who told me everything would be fine. However, I am sure I benefited from it. They probably didn’t always think everything would be, however, if a little spin made me take a more positive attitude then I am all for spin.

April 21, 2008

It is a fine morning and it has a spring smell about it. There are a lot of pheasants about this year along the Silverburn. The ducks also appear to have moved further up river than normal. I also note that the starlings are up to their old tricks again. Well, either that or they have started running the steam trains at 7 a.m. and late into the night. Starlings often imitate the daily sounds that go on around them. A starling from the Old Mill is now imitating the bleeper on the steam railway crossing at the entrance to the mill.

A starling almost killed me when I worked at the Royal Bank of Scotland. When the bank was on Prospect Hill, a starling frequently imitated the pelican crossing outside the bank. For quite some time I could not figure out what was going on. I would press the button and in due course the bleeper would go and I would try to cross the road only to be pulled back by someone. On one occasion I even phoned Douglas Corporation to come out and repair the crossing. They of course could find nothing wrong with it. Eventually I heard about a pelican crossing in Dublin where they had identified a starling imitating the bleeper. From then on, the only safe way to cross Prospect Hill at that point was to cross when everybody else did.

Many years ago a parrot was the cause of an accident on Douglas Quay. At that time the boats used to discharge into horse drawn carts. The horseman would stand along side the horse calling, “Backup, backup” repeatedly until the cart was close enough to the unloading vessel. On this occasion a pet parrot living across the road called out repeatedly, "Backup, backup" until a horse and cart, which had been parked on the quayside backed in to the harbour, as there was no vessel unloading at that time.

Our own parrot, Orry, has started to imitate Skipper. Not only does he call Skipper by name, but has now started barking as well. As I write Skipper is lying in his bed beside me in the office. However, the bloody parrot is barking like mad downstairs.

Well, its time to put the kettle on I think. Today, being Monday means I will go to Peel for some fish. My diet is in good shape at present. I am going to really make a strong effort not to be lured into the chippie today. I will of course let you know tomorrow how I get on.

April 22, 2008

Last night I took a bit of a wander at 10 o’clock around Poulson Park. I like to go in the dark as it means I can usually let Skipper fun loose, as the darkness usually means no one else will be in the park. It was a beautiful night. The grass had been mowed earlier in the day and the smell of the freshly mowed grass in the damp evening air made it a really pleasurable experience.

Being blind has its advantages. For a start you don’t need to divide the 24-hour day into day and night. You can have 24 hours of daylight or 24 hours of darkness if you like. It’s up to me basically. I can go off in the depths of the night and wander freely, totally alone, not in the slightest will I be impaired or restricted by the darkness, but of course I don’t. Wandering about at nighttime, with no sunshine and no birds singing is just a little bit like walking in the dark. I am happy to settle for just pinching an extra hour at the end of the day from my sighted companions.

I am becoming accustomed to pinching time. I guess chemotherapy is really all about pinching time. Today I have to go to Nobles for blood tests so that I can begin my last session of chemo tomorrow. Its also a big day for Barbara as she has to check in with her consultant later who, hopefully is going to tell her what is the problem with her chest and breathing difficulties.

In two weeks time, I will have a CT scan and this will let us know if my chemotherapy has rebuffed my cancer or not. This voyage has been a long one. We began in the Sea of Despair. We had many stormy days and at the beginning of the voyage a doctor had told me that there was very little that could be done for me. We crossed the Ocean of Despair, and then round Cape Hope. We are now halfway across the Sea of Promise. Along the way I have known good times and some not so good times. However, we have braved every storm and stood up to everything the elements have thrown at us. All of you good folk have played your part too in helping me deal with this situation and not just because of your very positive comments and emails. Back in February, I did not know what a blog was. Writing the blog each day not only gave me something to occupy my mind with, but it also has given me the outlet to express myself, and possibly to help others cope with whatever life in general has dealt them. I am grateful to you all. I know that around 100 of you log on each day; I also know that the blog is printed off each day for folk who don’t have access to computers. Indeed yesterday’s blog is probably blowing up and down Malew Street as I write.

Well a big thank you also to you who print the blog, so that amongst others, my Aunty Joyce in Ballasalla, Aunt Trudy in Port Erin, Pauline Cregeen in Port St. Mary and Diane at the gift shop in Castletown, get to read the blog. These are just the ones I know of, there are probably others. Collectively you have all made a huge contribution to my recovery.

Well now its time for me to climb back up onto the bridge and take my turn on the wheel. The Sea of Promise is calm, and the beautiful Isle of Somewhere lies dead ahead.

April 23, 2008

Today I will head to Nobles for my last chemotherapy session. It has been raining heavily during the night. I heard it bouncing off the conservatory roof at 3 am. Thankfully, it had stopped by 7:30 when I wandered along the Silverburn with Skipper. I met no one today, so no one got chased, although he did give the 7:40 am plane to Liverpool a good run for it's money. Yes, he still chases aircraft with a passion.

Now let me say hello and welcome to Steve Orr in New Zealand who contacted me yesterday. Steve is a Scot who was brought up in Castletown and now lives in New Zealand. Steve likes to think of himself as one of us Castletownians. Steve, it is a much greater honour to welcome somebody into our fold who wants to be one of us, than it is to be merely born here.

I would also like to say hello to Janine Sprialis. Janine is also a former Castletownian, now living for the past 30 odd years in South Australia. I must say, when Castletown's kids fly the nest, they don't half do it in style.

I have received a couple of emails asking about the *Beautiful Isle of Somewhere*. This is in reference to yesterday's blog where, I finished by saying I was on course for the Beautiful Isle of Somewhere. *The Beautiful Isle of Somewhere* is a hymn. I have always loved the words of this hymn so I now enclose it below. You can download the music from the Internet. I don't consider myself as a religious person, however, I do believe in God, just not a personal one and one that is more embracing than to only recognize Christians.

Can I please enter a plea here to our well-meaning Christian friends? Please, no phone calls or emails trying to save me! I am not worth it and I really do enjoy being a free spirit. Time has beaten me now though and I have reached the magic 300 words. 300 words is the minimum amount of words I set myself for writing the blog each day. Also it is now time to get ready to head for Nobles for that last chemo session.

Beautiful Isle of Somewhere
Somewhere the sun is shining,
Somewhere the songbirds dwell;
Hush, then, thy sad repining,
God lives, and all is well.
Refrain
Somewhere, somewhere,
Beautiful Isle of Somewhere!
Land of the true, where we live anew,
Beautiful Isle of Somewhere!
Somewhere the day is longer,
Somewhere the task is done;
Somewhere the heart is stronger,
Somewhere the guerdon won.
Refrain
Somewhere the load is lifted,
Close by an open door;
Somewhere the clouds are rifted,
Somewhere the angels sing.

April 24, 2008

It is actually Wednesday evening at the time of writing. It is a beautiful sunny still evening. I am just back from a wander along the Silverburn. The cows were all having a bit of a chinwag on the bridge that crosses in to the field that eventually takes you to the Old Mill, this meant in the interests of health and safety with Skipper in a particular lively and bouncy mood, we remained on the park side of the river. I love the walk through to the Old Mill. Last year Barbara did an oil painting of it and the painting sold almost before the paint had dried. We did have that particular painting photographed with a view to selling prints and these also have proved to be popular.

Well, I have now completed my chemotherapy. I had my last session Wednesday morning and I bade the wonderful nurses farewell. I now have to wait for two weeks for my CT scan to find out whether the treatment has been successful. In a strange kind of way, this two-week period is easier to deal with than actually knowing. At least at present whilst I don't know, I feel like it has been a success, but I don't know for sure until I have the results of the scan. It is better not to know something than to be given bad news. On the other hand, I might be given good news. But at least for the next two weeks I don't know anything for sure so I have hope and faith that the chemo has worked, not to mention all the prayers and good wishes from folk from all over the globe.

I do have some good news though. Her consultant told Barbara on Tuesday, that her chest problems are not related to her birds. They have told her that her condition is simply chronic asthma. She has been worried that she might have to get rid of our chickens, the birds in the aviary, and of course, Orry the parrot. Well, it seems the family of 40 cockatiels, 50 canaries, 6 grass parakeets, 2 rabbits, a guinea pig, 9 chickens, Orry the parrot, and of course Skipper the Border Collie, will all remain intact. Their mother is going to be OK, and their Dad is sort of sailing along on a wing and a prayer. But then, hasn't he always?!!

As I wandered along the Silverburn yesterday, I came across the Ronaldsway Halt. I climbed over the style and just a sort of lingered there for a moment. Of course I have begun and ended many of my walks along the river at Ronaldsway Halt, however, Barbara pointed out to me that there is now a bench there for folks who wait for the train. I don't know how long the bench has been there, maybe always, and I just haven't noticed it. Anyway, it occurred to me that Ronaldsway Halt must surely be the smallest Railway station in the world. Castletown station has platforms 'one' and

‘two’. If there is a job at Ronaldsway Halt for a station announcer, I reckon that even I could manage, “The train now standing at the bench is...!”

Well now Barbara has wandered up the stairs with Orry the parrot. I will let you in on a secret. I am terrified of birds. I love to listen to them, but there has got to be a little distance between them and me so, I am now off down the stairs to the front room where Orry is not allowed. It is time to settle down with a tin of John Smiths and listen to Manu play Barcelona. I love Orry dearly. I can chat with him until the cows come home. I just don’t want him flapping around me and standing on my shoulder.

April 25, 2008

I am now two days in to my period of uncertainty. I am finding it just a little more difficult than I thought it might turn out. In less than two weeks I will go to Nobles for my scan, which will decide if my chemotherapy has been a success. It's a bit like having being tried and now the jury has gone out and won't return for two weeks. When they do return, they will decide whether I will hang or be set free. Let's hope I have made a good case. For now, I can only deal with the present, with what I have and what I know. I am feeling very good. I am fit and walking again. My body and mind are active.

On Wednesday, Barbara bought a new camera while I was having chemo at Nobles. It seems a strange irony that Barbara's camera will capture moments and preserve them way beyond our lifetime, whereas, a bloody camera in two weeks time will decide if or how many more moments I am to have. Well this might sound like negative talk. I am not feeling negative at all, my friends. In fact, I am full of optimism. If my thoughts this morning are coming over as negative it is just my way of dealing with the situation. Once I have written my thoughts down, I have dealt with it. I feel better for doing so and I have made room in my mind and cleared my space of a little clutter.

Sometimes when I write the blog early in the morning, tiredness might influence the way I write. I never read my blog once I have written it. If I did that, I would probably never post it as I would be forever making changes and I want the blog to be representative of how I truly feel at the time of writing. To do anything else would be very unfair to any other cancer sufferers. It is also important that I try to reflect my thoughts as accurately as possible, if I don't manage to do this, then the blog becomes a complete waste of time.

April 26, 2008

It is Saturday morning. As a kid at school in Liverpool, I loved Saturdays. Saturdays meant a possible trip to Anfield to watch Liverpool play, providing I had the four shillings entry fee. If not, I could always head down to the Pier Head and spend the afternoon crossing backwards and forwards on the Mersey ferry. There was also the Isle of Man Steamers, that is, if I could blag my way past the policeman who sat in his little box, which sectioned off the deep water going ships from the ferries.

Today, and especially since I stopped work, Saturdays are no different to any other day. That sounds a little negative I know. However, when I say Saturday is just another day, my prospective on days, weeks and months has somewhat changed owing to the circumstances in which I now find myself. If you think of the days of the week as you do a box of chocolates, then Saturday is just another chocolate. There is no reason why it shouldn’t taste just as nice as Friday did.

Saturdays in my school days also were also spent wandering around Liverpool city centre. I wanted to share the busy city life with my brothers who were back in sleepy Castletown, on the Isle of Man. They would have loved the football, the docks and the general hustle and bustle of Liverpool. I, on the other hand, would have given anything just to be kicking a football or just ambling along Castletown’s quiet sleepy streets.

Today I might take a stroll down through our quiet streets and sit on the quayside for a while. As I listen to boats heading out in to the bay I would probably know all of the owners. Many of them would probably shout to me as they pass. Back in my childhood at the Pier Head on Saturdays I did the same thing. The difference was I sat on the landing stage listening to the distant foghorns of large ships sailing down the Mersey to far-flung parts of the world. I knew no one, and no one knew me. I would always be able to pick out that very distinctive triple bell steam whistle sound though of an Isle of Man Steam Packet ship and I would have given anything to have been onboard, sailing home. However, this was of course not to be. Time would pass and I would leave the landing stage to catch the bus back to my school convent on the outskirts of the city.

As I would stroll up the link span bridge that linked the floating landing stage to the main road, I would always be able to hear the preacher. There was always a preacher banging out passages from the bible on the Pier Head. The phrase I remember him using most was. “It is the will of God.” I often felt like smacking him or throwing him in the Mersey.

Whenever I had asked the nuns at the convent difficult questions such as, “Why am I here?” Their standard fallback was always the same response. “It is the will of God my child.” As I’d sit on my bus heading back to school, I would often reflect on my Saturday afternoon of freedom. If I had been down at the Pier, then I had spent the day surrounded by ships that might have taken me home, Heaven! Now I was sitting on a bus and heading for Hell. As the large heavy doors of St Vincent’s swung shut behind me it was like I had entered another world. The busy hustle and bustle of Liverpool was now firmly shut away. The ship’s foghorns, the traffic and the general buzz of the city, were now replaced with deadly quiet. As I walked down the polished corridors with my hands trailing along the spotlessly cleaned tiled walls that made the place feel anything but homely, I might hear a bell ringing calling the nuns to evening prayer. Passing the chapel, there would be the sound of the few nuns (who had arrived early for the prayer) chanting.
I would continue to the playroom where I would report on my day out to the other kids. A bell would ring, time for tea, another bell would indicate 30 minutes to bedtime and the last bell for time for bed. You lived by the sound of bloody bells.

Well a bell is ringing in my head right now. It’s telling me its time for Skipper’s next walk and that you have probably had enough of my schoolboy ranting for now.
I was thinking about Dad yesterday. Isn’t it strange that when you loose someone you love dearly, sometimes their memory brings back laughter and joy and other times just tears and sadness? Dad was a man of the land. I was always a man of the sea. I close today with this description of death by Henry Vandkike.

"I am standing at the seashore. A ship at my side spreads her white sails to the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean. I stand and watch her until, at length, she hangs like a speck of white cloud, just where the sea and sky come to

mingle with each other. . . . And just at the moment when someone at my side says: 'There, she is gone!' there are other eyes watching her coming, and other voices ready to take up the glad shout: 'Here she comes!' And that is dying."

April 27, 2008

Skipper really enjoyed himself this morning because we set off at 6 a.m. and had the whole park to ourselves. This meant he could run freely for 45 minutes or so, and how he loved it! We have now returned to the house and enjoyed steak and eggs for breakfast. What better way for man and dog to begin a Sunday morning?

Yesterday I was telling you about the Saturday's I spent in Liverpool as a school kid. Still in keeping with my box of chocolates theory, if we think of the days of the week as a box of chocolates, these days every chocolate is simply delicious. Back in those school days at the convent, Sunday's chocolate was absolute dross. It would have been one of those dead hard centres, or possibly even a laxative. The day would begin with compulsory mass at 8 a.m. After breakfast we would have to sit around not taking part in very much activity, as we had to wear our 'Sunday best' clothes. After Sunday lunch we would be allowed to dress down but couldn't wander very far from the convent, as we had to be back for afternoon benediction. Benediction would be followed by evening meal, then 10 decades of the rosary, a couple of hours of playtime, more prayers, and bed. The Sunday would end with Sister Ann standing at the entrance of the large dormitory shouting at the top of her voice that she was about to turn the lights out. Why they were ever turned on in the first place in a blind school remains a mystery to me. When I was a little older, I would wander off to the docks again and skip benediction. I figured my punishment of several decades of the rosary, dished out to me by the priest in the confessional box as a penance for my bad behaviour, was not too high a price to pay for an afternoon spent down at the Pier Head.

Some things simply never change, they are just meant to be. Later today I will probably slink off down to the harbour and meander along the quayside. I am still very much connected to the sea. I have my own boat of course in Castletown Harbour and I also have a house full of model ships. These are models I have collected down through the years. Most of them are in glass cases and adorn various parts of the house. Yet the one that holds pride place for me is not the magnificent model of the *Star of India* of which the original, built in Ramsey in 1863 and is now fully preserved in San Diego, USA. Nor is it the model of the Isle of Man Steam Packet vessel, *Ellan Vannin*, lost in Liverpool Bay with the loss of all hands in 1909. No, it is an old battered model of the Ramsey steam ship *Ben Ain*. She is not in a glass case, some of her rails have fallen away, and she is generally on the tatty side, however, I keep her like this because this is how I remember her for real. She used to sail into Castletown with cargos of coal and cement until she was broken up in 1963.

As a kid of about 7 or 8 years old, I recall being lifted from the quayside by my father and down onto the deck of the *Ben Ain*, during his lunch break when he was discharging her. I loved the feel of her iron deck beneath my feet. Also the hiss of her steam winch as it stood idle for the men's tea break, her gentle rolling as she either lifted with the tide, or fell away with the ebb. These tiny ships that kept our Island supplied with essentials back in those days had a sort of magic about them that even the great ocean liners that attracted me to the Pier Head on the Mersey could never muster.

There were two phrases that were often heard in Castletown in those days. The first one was. "There is a boat at 9 in the morning!" This was usually said to people we referred to as 'comeovers'. They would be people from off the Island who said something we didn't like. The second phrase was. "There is a boat at 7 in the morning!" These were the words uttered by Nelson Gill, the local stevedore. He would turn up at 8 or 9 at night and bang on our front door to inform dad. "There is a boat at 7 in the morning!" Nelson would walk around the houses until he had gathered up enough men to discharge the boat. It was nearly always the same gang, and you would be paid on the same day. So as soon as the vessel was emptied you collected your 4 quid.

Discharging a coal boat of 250 tons of coal by shoveling the coal in to steel tubs was extremely hard work. There was one chap who was part of the gang. We will call him J.K. He was a truly lovely kind man. Well at least to us kids at any rate. Once the boat had been discharged, J.K. would collect his money and head straight to the pub. He had a very large family, probably a dozen kids or more who may or may not have been waiting with eager outstretched hands when he got home. If they were they must have been frequently disappointed. The more J.K. drank, the more generous he became. He simply could not bear to leave the pub with money in his pocket. So, having had his fill of beer, he would spend what was left on bags of nuts and crisps. He would then stagger out of the pub, and as he wobbled along the road he showered any kid he came in to contact with his bounty of nuts and crisps. I can still hear his voice to this day calling out to me. "Tommy, hold your hands out and have presents from your old friend J.K"

April 28, 2008

I have two dogs to walk today as my brother has gone to Amsterdam for 4 days. Mother flies out to Liverpool this morning for a check-up after having laser treatment on her eye 2 weeks ago. So that leaves JD, a black Lab and of course Skipper in my care for the next few days.

The blog also is now moving in to new areas. From now on, the blog will be raising a few quid for Manx Cancer Support, and the Macmillan Nurses. This is because the magazine, Manx Tails, is going to make a donation to these charities every time they publish material from the blog.

These past few days have not been my best. My fourth and last period of chemo is proving just a tad more difficult than I had anticipated. I have got away very lightly from most of the side effects of chemotherapy but it looks like they were all being saved on hold for the last one. The consultant did warn me last week that things were going to start heating up. This time round I have been constantly tired and weary. I have aches and pains in my limbs, and my lungs feel as if they are full of gas. To compound matters, Barbara has picked up a lung virus. She is now on antibiotics and steroids. She is also wearing a mask in the hope that she doesn't pass the virus on to me. The chemo nurses tell me that should I catch a virus at this stage it could be really serious for me, as the chemo has killed all my resistances to illnesses. Not withstanding the fact that is not a particularly pleasant period for Barbara either. Anyway, let's not get too gloomy.

It is Monday morning on a spring April day. My tiredness, aches, pains and weariness will all pass and in a few days Barbara's virus will also be history.

Unfortunately, I am still experiencing problems in getting my emails through to readers in the US. I know we now have two new blog readers in Sacramento, one in Pasadena, and I think someone else in Illinois. Just hang on in there people and I will be in touch with you as soon as the present problems are resolved.

Monday is normally my day for going to Peel. However, forces have conspired against us today. Chemotherapy,

Barbara's virus, and dog watching will mean the only way I will get fish and chips today will be in my dreams. Talking of Peel, Wendy is a Peel girl who went to live and work in London. She has become a blog reader and returns to the Island this weekend. She is coming to visit me next Friday, and I am really looking forward to seeing her.

April 29, 2008

I have had a very broken night's sleep. I have awakened this morning not exactly feeling on top of the world. The aches and pains are still with me and I feel very tired and weak. Today is the first day since I began chemotherapy 10 weeks ago, that I have woken up and not felt strong enough to get out and walk Skipper. Never mind, I am now one week into the last session. It will be homeward sailing from here on I'm sure.

On the positive side, young Chris Callow, my boatman has got the fuel pump sorted onboard my boat the *Silverburn*. Hopefully, I will get a trip round the bay before the end of this week.

As I sit here writing this blog, I can hear all the birds singing their heads off! I wonder why birds never appear to be in a bad mood. I can also hear the traffic trundling along the main Douglas road taking hundreds of folk to work. In a couple of hours I will be able to hear the children's shrieks of delight coming from the school playground. Dogs will bark as their owners escort them in to Poulson Park. Nearly all the sounds I hear today through this window will be happy ones. I am reminding myself now of just how lucky I am to have woken up today in these circumstances. Other folk today will have woken up to gunfire, starvation, or poverty. I simply have a few aches and pains and have woken up yet again in a safe and secure environment. I have been lucky enough to live in one of the most beautiful parts of the world.

Well, there we go folks, when I first woke up this morning I felt a bit grumpy and miserable. With your help I have managed to psyche myself out of it. I probably won't manage a wander along the Silverburn today. None-the-less, I can go there in my head.

April 30, 2008

I woke this morning at 4:30. I feel much better today. As I write it's pouring rain but who cares? I have woken up feeling more like my old self once again. Yesterday was my worst day so far since I began the chemotherapy treatment. Throughout the course of the treatment I have tried to reflect the effects of chemo. On the down days, the object has been to reflect what it does, and how I have felt rather than attract sympathy. During my treatment I have been incredibly lucky, I only really copped for a few of the side effects on my last lap. Yesterday I was desperately tired all day. The chemo gas welled up inside me and filled my lungs with a gassy choking smell. It was like having to wear a sweaty sock over your nose and mouth all day. Barbara took me out in the camper to the beach for an hour during the afternoon. However, I was simply too tired to sit upright on a seat. I returned home and settled down to listen to Man United play Barcelona, a match I had been looking forward to. I fell fast asleep during the match though, and even at the end of it when I was trying to listen to the radio for a report on the game, I couldn't even manage that. The next thing I knew it was 4.30am. It's another day and I am feeling much better than I did yesterday. Here is hoping that I don't manage to fall asleep during Liverpool's match tonight.

Yesterday is now behind me, it will never return again, and stretching out before me is a brand new day full of promise and unfulfilled dreams.

In years gone by we used to go on day trips during the summer months from the Island. Most of them were exciting days out and happy experiences. The odd one went wrong, because of bad weather or delays. However, it didn't matter. If the day trip had gone well, you returned home refreshed and uplifted. If not, well you returned home to your safe and warm little nest once again. As a youngster, these day trips were the closest we ever came to holidays.

When I was a kid, the only holidays I knew were school holidays. I didn't know anyone else that went on holidays either. We just didn't. Apart from not being able to afford holidays, I don't think any of us would have wanted to. In my case time spent at home from school was priceless and I would not have wanted to waste one second of it somewhere else. Only rich people visited foreign countries and there was no rich folk living on the Janet's Corner housing estate where I grew up. The nearest we came to a holiday, would be a day out in Peel or Ramsey. The absolute bee's knees would be a day trip.

In the 1960's, the day trip was in its height of popularity. Thousands of folk sailed over for the day on the Steam Packet from Liverpool, Fleetwood, Belfast, Dublin, Ardrossen, and other places. Likewise, we Islanders would frequently take day trips to Liverpool, Llandudno and Dublin. I recall on one occasion heading off on a day trip to Dublin with my younger brother Kevin and Mother. We would have been about 10 years old. As Mother slept in one of the passenger lounges, Kevin and myself, being hungry, took ourselves off to have lunch. In those days, the Packet had not adopted the cheap and cheerful cafeteria style of catering. The silver service dining saloon with its lush carpet and the heavy table cloth draped across the solid timber table, together with the waiter hovering at our side to take our order, did not prepare a couple of 10 year olds for the huge financial shock that was about to come our way. Regular readers of this blog will be well aware of my love of fish and chips. However, digging deep in to my pocket and forking out 13 shillings put a real dampener on our day. We both returned to my mother one pound and six shillings lighter. We cobbled together from pockets, purses and what have you, another 7 shillings, just enough to buy a football in one of the large Dublin stores. I don't remember our meal on the return trip, but then a bag of crisps and a bottle of pop would hardly have left an imprint on my mind.

I do recall one of my neighbours once taking a day trip to Dublin. His name was Jack. In all the time I knew Jack, I don't think apart from this day trip that he had ever left the Island. Well, Jack and the boys decided they would take a day trip to Dublin. They all boarded the boat around 8 a.m. Jack was fond of a beer or two and no doubt had had his fill the night before. So he headed down below and got his head down in one of the lounges. After about 20 minutes one of the boys woke Jack and informed him that they were now back in Douglas again, and that they had sailed over to Dublin and back and Jack had slept right through the whole trip. Jack bounded up the stairs and back down the gangway again. Whether Jack actually ever did make it to Dublin on that day, I am afraid I can't remember.

I well remember Ned Quayle though. Ned lived just down the road from me. He was a lovely typical Manxman. He would call round to our house every Wednesday and we would do the football pools together. We always shared our winnings, even though Ned did all the paying. Ned supported Everton and as far as I know, had never been off the Island. One day Ned decided it was time to go and see his beloved Everton play for real at their home ground in Liverpool, Goodison Park. Ned apparently arrived at the ground, and was absolutely gobsmacked by the size of the place and the amount of folk queuing to get in. Of course Ned would have been aware of the fact that 50,000 fans would be attending these

matches. However, actually experiencing this phenomenon for real was something totally different. After several minutes of standing on the terraces and being hustled and jostled, Ned decided enough was enough, and decided real live football matches were not for him. Ned indeed was a lucky man to make it back to the Isle of Man more or less intact, having completed the almost impossible task of trying to leave a football match whilst 50,000 other fans were still trying to get in.

May 1, 2008

Just back from my morning walk, I shall probably take another after writing the blog and breakfast, which will be beans and cheese on toast. Talking of food, I read that someone was asking about food in Castletown on the forum the other day. I can't talk for the commercial places, however, if you're passing our house you are more than welcome to drop in for a bacon butty.

I have woken up feeling good again today. I am now in to my second week of my last chemo session. Only 7 days to go now, before I have the scan, which will tell all. Actually I've just had a letter changing the appointment to the day after, so it is 8 days.

I was thinking during the night of some of the odd places and predicaments I have ended up in, down through the years. So, here we go, I might as well share a few of them with you.

Back in about the mid 70's, a neighbour by the name of Johnny asked me if I fancied a night out in Douglas with him. We duly trooped off to Douglas on the bus. We did all the usual pubs along the Barbary Coast, and no doubt a few more as well. Anyway, at around 11o'clock we made out way back to the bus station to catch the last bus home. As we approached the bus station, Johnny began to slow down; he was already wobbling from side to side a great deal. He was a big man and I was having difficulty trying to keep him on an even keel on the pavement. Suddenly, he stopped dead, stretched out both arms, and yelled out at the top of his voice. "Tommy, the sea is calling me, I have to go!" And with that, flapped his arms like a great albatross and all I could hear were his great big feet echoing off the buildings as they hit the ground carrying Johnny's great bulk off to the sea. I never met up with Johnny again for a further 6 or 7 years. Where he ended up I know not. When we did meet again, I think he was too embarrassed to talk on the subject. I did hear a few weeks later though, that Johnny was in Brazil. I deeply suspect that the name of the ship that Johnny joined on the night in question though was the SS Palace Casino, and Johnny probably sailed out to Liverpool the following morning with the Steam Packet. Johnny was a lovely kind man who would do anything for you. He simply got a little worse for wear on that night, and what did actually happen to him on that night is now between Johnny and his maker. Johnny sadly died a few years ago.

Well, I have now had breakfast. It is 8 a.m. and now, just like Johnny all those years ago, I can feel the pull of the Silverburn calling me. Unlike Johnny though, the only folk I am leaving behind are you good people, however, not for 7 years.

Tomorrow I will tell you about the time I fell amongst a couple of odd balls in the town of Wolverhampton, in the West Midlands, UK.

May 2, 2008

Well at least it is a nice sunny day here and we have the whole summer ahead of us to look forward to. I have just read an email from South Australia where they are now approaching winter and have had to turn on their heating. Mind you, in South Australia their idea of a cold snap is bazaar to say the least. Today is going to be an exciting day as I am expecting a visit from Wendy, a blog reader from London who flew in last night, and after a heavy night's drinking with her father Bob in Peel, she might manage to visit me later on this morning.

I have just returned from a little hike along the Silverburn. The cows are all grazing in the meadow on the left hand side of the river as you walk north towards Ballasalla. Poulson Park was empty however, as it is a nice day, it is likely it will fill up with kids before very long.

Yesterday, I wrote of my night out in Douglas 30 years ago with Johnny. Those of you, who guessed that I was talking of Johnny Harding, are absolutely right. As are those who guessed that J.K. was in fact George Kewley in an earlier blog regarding emptying the coal boats in Castletown. Well yesterday I said I would tell you today about a trip I made to Wolverhampton back in the early 80's.

At the time I was working the markets at Rushen Abbey and Port Erin. The guy I was working for used to bring in his wares from a warehouse in Wolverhampton. I decided that I would take a trip over to Wolverhampton with him one weekend to stock up and meet the suppliers. I had never been Wolverhampton before apart from taking part in a swimming competition at school, in which I lost my two front teeth. Well over on the boat we went, and drove down to Wolverhampton. I had hardly taken a sip from my first pint, in the first pub we visited, when I got a tap on my shoulder. Ginger Jimmy had come to the Isle of Man about 10 years prior to my visit. He had only stayed on the Island for a few weeks on a building job. I had come to know him and shared a few pints with him in what was then known as the Duck's Nest in Castletown. There he was minding his own business, in his own local, when that bloody ghost from ten years past, Tom Glassey, returned to haunt him. Many stories and pints later, I arrived back at my digs, collapsed in a heap and slept until the following morning.

The following lunchtime I wandered into a pub in the centre of Wolverhampton. I sat and had a couple of quiet pints in the lounge bar. Having decided that the pub was just a little on the quiet side, I took my leave and headed down the road to seek somewhere a little busier. "We shall try and find somewhere a little busier", I commented to my pal James whom I had traveled with. "I don't think we will find anywhere busier," replied James. "Why ever not?" I said, "That pub was just about empty." "No, it wasn't," said James. "In fact that pub was just about full!" It seems that at that time and possibly it is still the case today, the deaf folk in Wolverhampton all met up in the George Hotel lounge bar on Sunday lunchtimes. I had sat amongst them whilst they had signed to each other, and I had been unaware of it. I suppose a totally blind man plonked in a pub full of deaf folk is never going to set the world on fire with laughter and general banter.

Well, on the third day, I was sitting in another pub thinking about how I had come to Wolverhampton on a bit of a wing and a prayer and met up with Ginger Jimmy the first night and then the next day I managed to walk into the only pub in town that is used by the deaf society of Wolverhampton, when two young lads sat down and joined me. We chatted for a while and exchanged pints as you do. I told the lads where I was from and of course they had never heard of the Island.

They were really a couple of scallies. However, like most scallies they were extremely friendly and likeable lads. They asked if I would like to join them for a few beers that night. I declined. However, it seems they interpreted my reluctance to join them, due to me being skint. “Don’t worry about money Tom lad,” they said. “We will do an ice cream van over tonight and take you out with us”. Well, I never turned up at the agreed meeting place so I really don’t know how the ice cream van or the two boys faired that night.

It’s now time for me to be on my way. The parrot is singing his head off. Skipper is barking, and the sun is shining.

May 5, 2008

This is Tom’s wife Barbara, filling in for Tom at the moment. Tom is fighting a stomach bug, which has him laid low. Due to his immune system being non-existent after chemo, I have had to contact the emergency doctor who is faxing through antibiotics and re-hydration sachets to the chemist.

This weekend Tom didn't blog as he has decided to do a 5-day week.

Tom was hoping to go boating today with young Chris, but the fog came in thick so he now won't feel too bad about having to stay in bed.
On the plus side, Tom is still feeling fine with regard to his lungs and will have a CT scan on Friday. The result of that will be known the following Thursday.
Hopefully he will be back writing soon and telling more of his tales.

May 6, 2008

It is great to be back again. I decided over the weekend that it would be probably for the best to cut the blog down to five days a week, as it might prove to be difficult to keep it up over 7 days. I would probably just dry up eventually. If I make it a five day week project instead of drying up, I will probably just become a little damp. Then of course nature stepped in and decided four days of blogging will be quite enough for you this week Glassey. Ah well, nature did not allow for Barbara stepping in. Anyway, I am back, you just can't keep a good man down, or as Ian Qualtrough would say, "You just can't get rid of rubbish!"

Talking of Ian Qualtrough, for those of you off Island or new to the Island, Ian Qualtrough used to run the timber yard, this is now run by his son John, in Castletown. Some years ago, a radio station was making a programme about Castletown and during the course of making the programme they took themselves off to Qualtrough's timber yard. Of course they had to interview Ian. During the interview, the interviewer said to Ian, "Well, Mr Qualtrough, just exactly how many men work for you then?" Ian thought for a moment, and then replied. "Well, I guess about half of them!"

I have just enjoyed a bacon bap for my breakfast after my 24 hour fast imposed on me by the doctor yesterday. Talking of breakfast, I recall a memorable breakfast I once had, or in fact, didn't have as the case maybe. It was back in the days of Manx Airlines. Do you remember those days we used to have over here, when the boats went to Liverpool and the planes went to Heathrow? Yes folks, once upon a time, our boats and planes actually took people to where they wanted to go, rather than where the ferry company or airline wanted you to go. Well anyway, I was flying out to Heathrow on the first flight out. They used to throw in breakfast as part of the deal. I was traveling alone, and the breakfasts were served in plastic moulded trays. These trays that held your breakfast were in fact a remarkable peace of engineering. The breakfast or parts of the breakfast fitted exactly in to each moulded bit of the tray. The groove moulded out for the sausage was exactly the right size for the sausage, and so on for the bacon, black pudding and hash brown. There was not one millimetre to spare. I would imagine even a person with sight would have difficulty cutting up this breakfast with the plastic knife and fork provided. For a blind person it was just about impossible. Well, as I stabbed away at my breakfast, with the food fast disappearing from my tray, I heard the stewardess asking the chap sitting next to me if he would like a breakfast. "No thanks" he replied. "I have already got most of his!"

I close today with a big farewell to Wendy and Sean. Wendy, a Peel girl who left to seek her fortune in London many years ago, popped in to visit me over the weekend. She is a regular blog reader and it was brilliant to meet up with her and her partner Sean. I hope they both return to the island again soon.
This weekend I look forward to meeting up with another blog reader, Anna from the Wirral. Anna, the wine is in the cooler, and the sunshine is on order.

Well people it is now time to bid you all farewell. If I am not struck down by another virus, bus, or runaway steam train, I shall be back tomorrow.

May 7, 2008

Yesterday was a bit of a landmark for the blog. We reached 7000 hits since we started back in February, and yesterday we had 150 readers, which I think is the highest amount of readers in a day since we began. With the amount of blogs that are printed off for people who don’t have access to computers and the blogs that are printed in Manx Tails, we are now reaching thousands of people each month, a very big thank you to all.

I am just back from walking Skipper. It is another beautiful day. As I wandered through Poulson Park, I passed the sliding thing the kids play on in the top corner. I don’t know what they call it. Anyway once upon a time there used to be just a plain old-fashioned seesaw there. I remembered one day when I was about 7 or 8 being in the park with my brother, we jumped on the seesaw only to discover it was broken. The leg that prevented it from going all the way down to the ground had broken off. Dad nipped off somewhere and came back with a branch and screwed it onto the seesaw. With the seesaw working again, we were happy kids. I remember a couple of kids shouting down the park to their mates. “Mr Glassey has fixed the seesaw!” I somehow doubt that such a small deed would bring such enjoyment or cause kids to be as grateful today. Indeed you probably wouldn’t be allowed to fix the seesaw unless you were fully compliant with all the health and safety regulations, not to mention donning a hard hat, a pair of metal toe capped boots, and of course a copy of the latest health and safety manual. Well there doesn’t appear to be anything as simple as a seesaw in the park these days. Toys like we had have moved on and become much more complicated.

Last night I received the sad news that my old friend Tony Mincher has died. Tony has been struggling with cancer and heart problems for sometime. Tony was always full of fun. In fact I don’t think there was a serious bone in his body. I was, on more than one occasion the victim of his practical jokes. Here is my account of one of them. I will be telling you of many more in the coming months.

Tony called one Sunday, lunchtime to take me for a pint at the Lancashire Hotel in Santon. At that time Tony was driving a little two-seater sports car. We arrived at the Lanky as it was known, had a couple of beers and left to return to Castletown. As we got outside, Tony told me excitedly that his car had been vandalized whilst we were in the pub. Tony opened the door of his car, and once I was seated in the passenger seat, he pulled out his camera and clicked away. Tony had put me in an old wreck of a car that had been abandoned in the pub car park. The car had no engine, no wheels, and no windows. Tony stood there laughing his bloody head off with his camera as I waited to be driven away in this engineless, wheel-less car.

On that same day, I also remember calling in at the Golf Links Hotel at Castletown for a pint. Tony went ahead of me, and as we passed through the revolving doors, Tony continued through and headed for the bar. I went all the way round and as Tony stood at the bar ordering his pint, I was stumbling around back in the bloody car park once again.
God bless Tony, and let's hope they have a sense of humour up in Heaven, for sure they are going to need it.

Tomorrow I will tell you about my night spent in custody with Tony.

May 8, 2008

Another fantastic day begins. I have already walked Skipper, had breakfast, and now after a bit of writing we shall see what the rest of the day has lined up for me.

I have Fred working away in the front garden at present. He is painting the boat and lighthouse and tidying up the wall. He is on holiday from Liverpool for a few weeks, and was at a bit of a loose end, so I have set him to work. Say hello to him should you pass by.

Thank you to all who emailed me the meaning of the word blog. At least I now know what I am doing.

Tomorrow is a big day for me, as it is the day of my CT scan. This will tell me whether my chemotherapy treatment has been successful or not. Of course I won't know the results until next Thursday when the consultant comes over from Liverpool. Well I have had my photograph taken many times in the past, but I never thought a trip to Braddan tomorrow, just to have my photograph taken, would have so much riding on it.

Yesterday I told you about the sad death of my old pal Tony Mincher. Tony's funeral will be at the Catholic Church, Castletown at 10 a.m. on Monday. Tony was a plasterer from Wolverhampton who came here probably in the early 70's. Tony was a flamboyant character. Whenever you were with Tony, you simply never knew what was going to happen next, and to be honest it was just as well.

I recall one Sunday evening. I had gone to the Union Hotel in Castletown for a couple of pints. Whilst there, I met up with Tony who offered me a lift home. My house was only about half a mile from the Union so after we had been driving for about 10 minutes, I said, "Tony mate, we seem to be taking a very long route to my house." "We are on our way to the casino," replied Tony. I was never a fan of the casino, and I didn't gamble however, I was now heading for the casino in Tony's transit builders van.

I don't remember much about my unexpected night out in the casino. It was the trip back to Castletown that turned out to be very eventful. I guess this would be about the mid 70's. Drinking and driving was socially more acceptable then than it is today. Thank goodness we have learnt our lessons. I guess it was a bit like the smoking thing really. A lot of drivers drank more than they should have, but we were just a bit more tolerant towards it, just as we were with regards to smoking. Anyway, back to my story. We were heading up Richmond Hill when the police stopped us. I guess Tony falling flat on his face as he stepped out of the van did not help our cause. The handbrake did not appear to be working either and soon I began rolling backwards down Richmond Hill. In the meantime Tony had managed to mumble to the copper something about his mate in the passenger seat being blind. The next thing I knew, a very out of breath policeman had jumped in to the driver's seat. "I have arrested Mr. Mincher," he said. "He tells me you are blind, is that true?" "Yes, that is true" I replied. With that, the policeman radioed back to his head quarters and explained that he had arrested someone for drunk driving, and that they had a blind passenger and he was not sure what to do regarding the blind passenger. "Bring him in as well", came the reply. I must say, I have stayed in both better and worse places than Douglas police cells. Tony proved to be a very noisy roommate, frequently calling out for cups of tea. On that particular night, I have to say, room service was not up to much. I had only gone to the Union the night before for a couple of beers, however, like I said at the start, with Tony, you just never knew what was going to happen next.

May 9, 2008

Today was another milestone in my battle against cancer. I had my CT scan this morning and now I must wait until Thursday to find out the results. I find these CT Scans just a bit daunting. Lying on a funny bed that moves along with this big camera thing coming down on top of you, not to mention the damn noise of the thing, is not my idea of fun. I had a wonderful nurse though, Kathleen who is from Stranraer. I feel now that I have more or less come to the end of my trial, my doctors and consultants have done their best and pleaded on my behalf to The Boss or God, or whoever pulls the strings. I have also done my best and now I await the jury's decision. So, we shall say no more on that now until next Thursday.

After I left the hospital, we headed for Peel and for once, in fact the only time I can remember, I did not have fish and chips. Yes, I managed to walk the length of Michael Street and kept out of the chippie. I did stop by in a café though and had pie and chips, but that doesn't count.

I am now about to head off up the Silverburn with Skipper. It's Friday afternoon, the rain has stopped; the weekend is just around the corner. Life in general is OK. Our ship is sailing along on an even keel.

May 10, 2008

It's raining and there is a thunderstorm passing overhead. The forecast is for thick fog as well. None-the-less, we shall an attempt to go to sea at about 2 p.m. today. We have no wind whatsoever at present and this is the first day this week with no wind. We have GPS onboard and good local knowledge so we should be fine dossing about in Castletown Bay. I have just remembered I am not supposed to be blogging on weekends anymore. Well, now that I have started, I shall finish.
I have just told you my day's plan, however, my plans are usually not worth the paper they are written on. On so many

occasions in the past I have woken up in my own home on a normal day and expected to do normal things, only to have ended up going to bed in a totally different place amongst people I didn't know.

One Saturday I woke up in my own bed in Janet's Corner, Castletown and went to bed on the same evening in Manchester. A well-known character by the name of Eddie Hudson, better known as Ed the Red, bumped in to me in Castletown and told me he was heading off to Manchester to a wedding and asked would I like to come. "No," I said. "I have never been to Manchester and why would I tag along to attend a wedding of folk I didn't know." Well, to cut a long story short I ended up on the boat that afternoon and by teatime, I was knocking it back with the rest of them. I stayed that night amongst total strangers who must have wondered just what the heck I was doing amongst the guests at their wedding.

I woke the following morning and had a hearty breakfast, and set off with Ed on a whistle stop tour of Manchester. We began by walking along the bank of the Blackwater Canal. Before long, we found ourselves onboard a passing boat. The boat was on its way to Worcester, so we tagged along for about 5 miles of the trip, where we put ashore and made our way by bus, back to the centre of Manchester. I now discovered the plan was to remain in Manchester until such times as we had both ran out of money. In my case this would not be very long.

That evening, Ed and I hit the town. We started off in a nightclub that Ed used to frequent many years earlier when he lived in Manchester. I sat down at a table while Ed went up to the bar to get the drinks. After about half an hour, I suspected that all was not well. A guy eventually came and sat at my table and explained that two guys had jumped on Ed while he was at the bar. Ed eventually turned up a few minutes later and apart from being a little roughed up, he was none the worse for his experience. We left the nightclub and headed for a pub called the Lord Nelson, better known by the locals as the Nellie. To describe the Nellie as a dive would be a generous description in the extreme. I had only been in there for about 10 minutes when a fight broke out. A few tables got knocked about with much shouting and bawling before it all died down. Apparently during the mêlée someone got stabbed and was not too happy about it. No great fuss though, it appeared to be quite a normal happening. A little while later as I sat there sipping my pint, what seemed like a wall of water engulfed me, and the rest of the bar. The guy who had been stabbed had now returned to the pub seemingly fully recovered from the stabbing, with a fire hydrant to seek his revenge. We left the pub absolutely soaked through to the skin. Ed then decided it would be a good idea to stop by at an Indian restaurant for a meal. I have no idea why I agreed to sit down in a restaurant soaked through. However, with nowhere else to go it probably seemed as good an idea as anything else. Anyway, I had only been sat down for a few minutes when this total stranger plonked himself down beside me. He explained that he was buying me the best meal in the house. He went on to explain that he had just discharged the hydrant in the pub and he hadn't meant to include me. He explained how sorry he was and insisted on buying me a meal.
The next day with our money now running low, we made out way to the local Natwest Bank to seek an overdraft to extend our trip. Fortunately, Ed managed to rub up against a door covered in wet paint on the way in. This gained us £30 compo from the bank manager, so off we went again.
That night we headed in to town to a strip club. It was ten pence to get in and Ed and his brother pleaded with the doorman to let me in for half price. The doorman steadfastly refused to allow me in at a discounted rate, blind or not. He probably wondered just what the hell a blind man was doing trying to get in to a strip club anyway. Later that night we ended up back in the Nellie again. I sat down and had a few beers with all the guys who had been fighting the night before. They all behaved as if nothing at all had happened out of the ordinary, all pals again. I didn't linger for too long though, as I formed the impression that things could change very quickly in that place.

The following day, our money had run out once again, and despite our very best endeavours, we could not find any banks with wet painted doors. So, we returned home on the car ferry, *Ben My Chree*. I will always be grateful to Ed for one of the most entertaining and unusual weekends of my life.

Well, I guess you can never tell just exactly how your day is going to turn out can you? Such is life itself. I simply do not know what the results of my CT scan will be next Thursday. If one day in my life can turn out to be so different than I had expected, then who knows what the outcome of my cancer is going to be.

May 12, 2008

It is a wonderful morning. I have just returned from a walk down through the Old Mill, and later I hope to go and spend a couple of hours out on Fort Island.

On Saturday we put my boat *Silverburn* through her paces after fitting the new fuel pump. We set sail at 3 p.m. with boatman Chris Callow, old seadog Michael Quine, my brother Lenny and myself. We steamed up and down Castletown Bay for a couple of hours with no problems whatsoever with the engine. Then, as we headed back to the harbour, helmsman Quine's nose detected a smell of burning. Captain Chris Callow confirmed the smell and the main engine was hastily shut down. Brother Lenny and owner Tom Glassey were duly summoned out on deck and as the engine cover was lifted the committee pontificated as to what might be the cause of the burning smell. Just to confuse matters further, the engine itself was cold. We could find no reason for the burning smell, yet we could all smell it. After drifting for about 5 minutes, the smell disappeared. We then decided to throw caution to the wind and fire up the engine again. As we steamed full ahead for the harbour, we spotted in our wake, a group of barbecuers on Scarlett. We had been down wind of them and mistaken their burning sausages and burgers for a problem with our engine. Should I ever write another book, I might well call it, "Four Men In A Boat".

Yesterday, we cruised to Port St Mary and back, dropping my brother Lenny off at the Albert and collecting Ray Cregeen to take him fishing for an hour in Port St.Mary Bay before returning to pickup brother Lenny, and back to Castletown.

I have decided now to blog for 6 days a week and just like The Boss, I shall rest on the 7th.

May 13, 2008

It is another beautiful day. Last night I, boatman Chris, and my brother Lenny took *Silverburn* out for an hour's fishing in Castletown Bay. We caught nothing, so we called in the co-op on our way home and all enjoyed tuna sandwiches for supper. Later I shall head for St. Johns to check out the possibility of buying a new camper van. We are thinking now, if I have to go to Clatterbridge for three weeks, it would probably be better to stay on a caravan site than in a B & B. Our existing camper would be a bit small to live in for 3 weeks.

I said earlier this week that I would not mention Thursday again, until after I had the results of my scan. So, I will probably now talk of little else. Of course Thursday is playing on my mind right now. It is a little difficult to plan ahead

without knowing the results of the scan. Yet, I am sure that thinking positively and doing positive things has certainly aided my recovery, like buying another boat for example. Back in February I was really ill. If someone had told me then, that by May, I would be out sailing again and walking Skipper along the Silverburn, I would have told them to dream on.

It is not only over the rainbow, where the dreams that you dare to dream, really do come true. Your dreams, whatever they are, really can become reality and all you have to do is dream. Once upon a time you weighed around 6 lbs, you couldn't talk, or walk. The only thing you could do, was dream, now look at you.

Well back to camper vans now. When we lived in Ramsey, we owned a small Bambi camper van. I recall one very pleasant day we spent out on the Point of Ayre. Eventually it was time to go home. On starting the van it became apparent to us that the Bambi had become stuck in the sand. I got out and started to push. I pushed like hell. She eventually moved a few feet and then she became totally stuck again. I pushed and pushed until I was totally exhausted. I returned to the passenger seat and told Barbara it was no good, the van is well and truly dug in. She laughed and said "Jump in you bloody fool, you pushed us out of the sand five minutes ago, and I have been sitting here now with the hand break on waiting for you to get in!"

May 14, 2008

We have just returned from my morning walk along the Silverburn with Skipper and it is another lovely sunny day. Skipper's social behaviour has improved drastically lately. This morning he allowed me to talk to four dogs and their owner and then totally gobsmacked me by not chasing the man on the bike we met up with near the waterfall. As a reward for his good behaviour, he received a sausage from the garage on our way home.

Yesterday I did not become the owner of a new camper van. We just could not agree terms with the dealer. However, I did make it in to Peel and of course stopped off for fish and chips at the Castle Chippie on the quay.

Tomorrow is my big day. I will discover if my chemotherapy has been successful or not. I would very much like to press a switch and shoot straight in to tomorrow. However, at present I have a full day of not knowing ahead of me, and maybe this last 24 hours of uncertainty is as good as its going to get for me. On the other hand, maybe tomorrow I will be given a clean bill of health and cancer will be history. I believe that I am fully prepared for whatever they tell me tomorrow, I still can't be sure how I will react to either positive or negative news. I believe that in life there are as many positives as there are negatives, and only a fool looks at one of them.

As I sit here talking to you all now, I am reminded of the words of Captain Jack Ronan. Many years ago Captain Jack was taking me back to the convent in Liverpool after having me onboard his Steam Packet ship for an evening. As we stood on the school drive outside the main heavy timber doors, Capt Jack saw tears welling in my 10-year-old eyes, and placing his hand on my shoulder, he said. "This will all pass, in no time at all, it will be history." So it is today some 40 years on. Yes, this too will all pass.

May 15, 2008

Yes my big day has arrived finally. I will be holding this blog back until this afternoon so that I can keep you up to date with my news.

I woke several times during the night. At around 5 a.m. the rooks were making one hell of a din. I discovered later that a baby rook had fallen in to the Silverburn River and the rooks were all encouraging the baby rook back to the bank and eventually to safety. We have witnessed this type of behaviour before with the rooks when a baby falls out of a nest. It is not just the baby rooks immediate family that come to the rescue, it is every rook in the area, hence the din at 5 this morning. In this case, the action taken by the rooks failed, and the baby rook drowned and floated on down the Silverburn. My wife Barbara rescued another baby rook which was also in the river and unable to get out. She put it on the bank and hopefully its parents will have guided to safety. I will complete this blog later today when I am back safely in the tree once again.

Since I began blogging back in February, my life sometimes seems like a soap opera. Sometimes I have to remind myself that this is for real. The script is written by The Boss, and there are no guarantees of a happy ending or for that matter a new beginning. However, life has generally been wonderful to me, still is, and who is to say that the sun won't still be shining tomorrow?

I have just arrived back from the hospital. I firstly want to thank everyone who sent me those text messages and emails this morning. I hope I have now replied to you all. Now to the news! Well we have parted the cancer clouds, or at least made a huge dent in them. My cancer has been reduced by 90 per cent. To try and rid me of the remaining 10 per cent they are packing me off to Clatterbridge for radiotherapy. This will be for a three-week period and probably in about a month's time.

Thank you all so very much for your support and good wishes. The war is not quite won yet but we have another battle to our credit, and the resistance is now little more than a token gesture.

So, unlike the baby rook that drowned in the river this morning, I am back and safe in the tree once again.

May 16, 2008

I am not sure where to begin this morning. I can only say a huge thank you to all of you who got in touch yesterday with your good will messages. Val, yes I think I know who you are and thank you very much indeed for the bottle of whisky you left on my doorstep and the lovely card.

I have never believed in miracles, although at the same time I am not sure as to who or what I should be most grateful to with regard to my recovery. If The Boss up there gave me the cancer, then I am very grateful to Him for removing it, or at least most of it. If it's all down to the doctors, chemo and nurses, then I am very grateful to them.

I am not sure if at this stage I am allowed to claim that a diet of fish and chips and 5 tins of John Smith's each day is a remedy for sorting out lung cancer. However, if others can make wild claims regarding apples and Mars bars, then how about this as my swan song to cancer.

"If an apple a day keeps the doctor away and a Mars bar helps you work, rest and play, then fish and chips and 5 tins of John Smith's keeps cancer at bay."

Talking of miracles, I remember when I was at the convent in Liverpool, each year the nuns would arrange for some of the very young blind kids to be taken to Lourdes in France. The kids would be taught how the Virgin Mary once appeared there and how handicapped people now come from all over the world to be cured. Of course these blind children returned to the convent as blind as they were before they left. As an older kid, I remember thinking to myself how cruel it was for the nuns to be filling these kids up with such hope. I do accept though that the nuns actually believed this, however, for me that did not justify the passing on of such false hopes to 5-year-old kids.

I am reminded now of a story told to me by my old friend Finbar, now living in Port Erin.
The story goes of how Paddy went to Lourdes hoping to be cured from his backache. After bathing in the waters he discovered that his backache had completely gone. Unfortunately for Paddy, he was pulled up at customs at Dublin airport on his return. "What is in this bottle!" asked the customs officer. "Holy water from Lourdes!" said Paddy. "Well now," said the customs officer. "I think I better unscrew the top and taste it!" With that the customs officer unscrewed the lid and after tasting it discovered, that what was actually in the bottle was brandy. "So," said the customs officer. "Just how do you explain the fact that this bottle is full of brandy Paddy?" "Be Jayses," replied Paddy, "another miracle."

Well if Paddy's holy water turned into brandy in his suitcase on his way home from Lourdes, then I have no problem in claiming that my regular diet of fish and chips, and of course John Smith's have sent my cancer packing.

May 17, 2008

Just back from walking Skipper and I'm going out in the boat shortly.

I have received a letter from Clatterbridge this morning telling me they would like to see me on June 2nd. This will mean a day trip to the Wirral and my 3-week stint should follow about two weeks after.

We have now found a caravan site about 3 miles from Clatterbridge, so all we need to do now is sell the camper we have and buy another one. Well that might sound a bit daft, it is simply that there is nothing wrong with the one we have, it is just a bit basic for living in for three weeks.

Last night I got drunk, well at least I was according to Barbara. Every Friday evening we have what is known as 'the gathering'. We gather around the table, that is, Ray Cregeen, Michael Quine, boatman, Chris Callow and myself. Last night we opened a special bottle of whisky. The whisky was given to me by Declan O'Sullivan, the MD of Pelagos yachts of Ramsey. Declan gave me the whisky after I wound up my business back in January. I had just been diagnosed with cancer, and had been told I probably didn't have long to live. I didn't think there would ever be a special occasion to open the bottle, so I put it to one side. The good news I received this week, that after chemo, my cancer had been reduced by 90%, meant that the special occasion I thought would never come, had indeed arrived, and so the bottle was opened. We seldom get drunk at the gathering. We meet every Friday and tell and laugh at the same stories every week. We did get carried away last night though and Ray's wife stole our whisky. She did return it however; we had more than enough drunk by the time she returned it.

Val, if you are reading this blog, we shall open your bottle of whisky at next Friday's gathering for which we all thank you.

It is now 12:30 p.m. and I have just returned from a fishing trip onboard *Silverburn*. We caught absolutely nothing and returned to the harbour early because of a fuel leak. Boatman Chris has now gone to fetch a new seal, and hopefully we will try again tomorrow morning.

Yesterday I told you a little story about Finbar. Well here is another.

One day we were stood at the bar in the Viking. It was, I think, Sunday lunchtime. The door opened, and in walked a Lord. We had never met a Lord before. I have forgotten his name, but he used to sponsor or look after the racing driver James Hunt. Anyway, Finbar was drinking some pocheen that he had managed to obtain from somewhere, certainly not the Viking. The Lord became curious regarding Finbar's drink, so Finbar offered him some. "I say," said the very well spoken Lord." "Just exactly how the devil do you drink this stuff?" "In your case," said Finbar, "catch hold of the glass with one hand, and something else with the other!"

May 19, 2008

I have already completed two walks this morning. A quick trip along the Silverburn, and now we (Barbara, Skipper and I) are just back from a trip to the beach. The tide was about half in, the wind is about force 4 from the Southeast and the sun is shining. The beach was empty. Strange that, as I have walked the beach in the winter, early on dark, cold and windy mornings, and there is usually at least a couple of hardy folk down there. I guess an early morning summer walk is no challenge to them.

Now then, I want to say a big hello to young Catrina who is 12 I think, and lives just outside Glasgow. I think she is the youngest and newest blog reader. Catrina, you are welcome, and I look forward to hearing from you as we blog along.

I did get out in my boat yesterday with boatman Chris and my brother Lenny. As usual we caught no fish, but at least we made it back to the harbour without breaking down.

The guy I bought the boat from once broke down in Derbyhaven Bay and because he had no auxiliary engine, he had to paddle his way back to Derbyhaven breakwater. I say paddle, because the only way he could bring the boat home was by unscrewing a cupboard door and scull the boat back to Derbyhaven using the cupboard door as a paddle. After his experience he obviously was somewhat concerned that the same thing might happen again so, he took himself off to a boatyard which might explain the ruddy great paddle that still lies on the after deck of the boat. I have replaced this method of propulsion now with a new Honda outboard engine.

Getting home again has been a problem that has bedeviled me for most of my life. Barbara and my Mother had Sunday lunch out yesterday at the Flying Club. Many years ago I frequented the Flying Club and often at weekends we would fly over to Newtownards in Northern Ireland, with the then steward of the Flying Club, Dennis McDonald. Dennis was a local

comedian in the Down Patrick area of Northern Ireland. The trouble was, we would stay in a local hotel and Dennis, who liked a drop to drink, would often get too drunk and not be able to fly us back the following day.

I recall one weekend, we had flown in on the Friday evening, and we were supposed to be returning on the Saturday afternoon. Dennis got blottoed on the Friday evening and was in no fit state to fly us home on the Saturday. So we all checked in again at the local hotel for Saturday evening. It was decided that in order to keep Dennis sober, we would let him have a few beers at teatime, but then confine him to his room for the remainder of the night. To make sure he did not escape we all took our turn at guarding his room. Yes I also took my turn at standing guard outside his room. I did however, have a bottle of Blue Nun. Now I don't know if it was when I slipped away to the toilet or Dennis just had no problem giving his blind security man the slip, but it seems I spent an hour or more standing guard outside an empty bedroom. On hearing the shrieks of laughter coming from the bar at Dennis's jokes, it was easy for me to follow the sound, and make my way back to the bar. Dennis had indeed made his way back there. They had all forgotten that I was on guard duty, so I rejoined the gang. We drank early into Sunday morning, went to bed, and flew home on Sunday evening.

May 20, 2008

I did not have my 5 tins of John Smith's last night. Instead I had just one glass of Declan O'Sullivan's very expensive whisky.

Well I decided it was finally time to put myself on a so-called proper diet. So, I began last night by cutting out the fish and chips. Yes I told Barbara to bring me back a donner kebab and chips from Keig's chippie in Port St. Mary. The donner kebab was gigantic. I have never had one before, and to be honest I don't think I will again. I don't think I'm a kebab person. I'm more a fish man myself. So, Joanne and Michael, I will be back for fish and chips next time as my 24-hour diet has ended. Michael and Joanne use to be my next-door neighbours when I lived in Port St. Mary. There will be more about the Keigs in later blogs.

During the night I found myself thinking about cancer, why and all that. No, not why me! Just simple little questions such as, why do we have to endure things like cancer, whose idea was it to send us a dollop of cancer and why? Is it a present from God, The Boss or whoever? So far I have returned the package twice. However, the postman doesn't appear to know where to return it too, and keeps bringing it back. I got to wondering, what are the benefits of cancer. Well, for one thing I would not be sitting here now writing this blog, would I? I would not have made all the new contacts and friends that the blog has brought. If I had not been blind, I would never have written my book. I probably would never have met and married Barbara or gone on to enjoy the wonderful life I have been blessed with so far. I am no philosopher and I do not believe that any of the world's religions are any better or more likely to be right than any other. So, why then did The Boss create what appears to be such an unfair world? Well, when you stop and think about it, maybe it's not really that unfair. Just imagine what kind of world it would be if everyone were the same, if everyone was born equal. That is, the same size, the same colour, the same intellectual ability, and physically the same. Life would be so pointless. None of the world's great leaders would have emerged such as Ghandi, Kennedy or Churchill. Well we would all be the same, all on the same level. The Olympic Games would be totally pointless, as we would all be gold medallist. There would be no one to aspire to. We would all be able to sing, write, and play football at the same level. Life would be totally pointless. Maybe that's why we are all different. Today it is my turn to carry the load, tomorrow it may be yours.

I said yesterday, that I seem to run into trouble when I am heading for home. Another example of this was a trip I once made to Ardrossan on the *Ben My Chree* car ferry some years ago. I sailed up with her on Saturday lunchtime as a guest of Captain Jack Ronan. We were to sail back to Douglas the following Sunday lunchtime. On this trip I decided to muck in with the crew down aft. We arrived in Ardrossan at 6 p.m. and after all the passengers and cars had been unloaded, the crew and I went ashore for a few beers.

Well we had a cracking night in Ardrossan and after calling at the Indian takeaway on our way back to the ship; we wobbled along the quay just a little worse for wear. The bosun, who shall remain nameless, and I boarded the wrong ship, and after having been thrown off we eventually located the *Ben* further along the quay, which incidentally on inspection the following morning, didn't look anything remotely like the ship we had mistaken for her. Anyway we ate our takeaway and headed for bed. The problem was, I had not been actually allocated anywhere to sleep. After much to-ing and fro-ing, it was decided that I should sleep in the top passenger lounge. This was fine, except for the fact that we had forgotten that the stewardesses cabins were just off the passenger lounge, and because no one had told them, when they awoke the following morning and found me asleep in the lounge, they thought I was a stowaway, and tried to throw me off the ship. Of course I protested and demanded that they send for the captain. I was very grateful however when Sherby, the ship's chief officer, turned up to march me off for breakfast.

May 21, 2008

The smell of the hawthorn in the lane as you enter Poulson Park does put you in a good frame of mind at the start of your walk. I also noticed the strong smell of hawthorn at Ronaldsway Halt yesterday evening.

I didn't wake until 6 this morning, which is rather late for me. The radio and TV are full of nothing else but tonight's European Cup final between Manu and Chelsea. As a Liverpool supporter, I wish it were possible for both to lose. Well that is not very charitable of me is it? OK, but surely a draw would also be a very unfair result, as Manu would be sure to win the penalty shoot out. Ronaldo has had so much more practice at taking penalties than anyone else in the world!

As a kid at the blind school in Liverpool I played a lot of football. We played with a standard ball. However, about 20 tiny ball bearings were shoved inside the ball to make a noise. I was always the goalkeeper and the goal, of which there was only one, was the gable end of the school assembly hall. I was also the only totally blind child that took part, as the rest of the kids did have a little sight. However, we did have one totally blind teacher, who used to join in. The good thing about Mr. McDermott was that because he was totally blind like me, whenever he took a shot at the goal, and the ball went whistling passed me and slammed against the gable wall, as it bounced back I would shout "great save Sir. That one almost got past me". The rest of the kids used to threaten that if I ever stepped out of line, they would tell Mr. McDermott how many goals he had really scored against me. I do believe he had some idea though, as he would say from time to time. "Glassey, if you are as good as you say you are out in that playground, one day you will be the first blind goalkeeper to play for England, and you will be the best ever."

It was Bill Shankly who once said, "Football is more important than life or death." Well Bill is dead himself now, and has probably changed his mind.

Last February when I was first diagnosed with cancer, I did wonder if I would be around for tonight's cup final. Unless the Port St. Mary bus mows me down today, I will be. So, joking aside, I will enjoy tonight's final, no matter who wins it. I also now harbour hopes of being around for next year's and who knows how many more after that. Cancer teaches you to be grateful for every day, and then maybe the years will take care of themselves. Just like the old saying, "Look after the pennies, and the pounds will look after themselves."

May 22, 2008

This week Barbara has a bad back, and so I am walking alone with Skip. This morning we have had Poulson Park all to ourselves. I did forage along the Silverburn for a short distance. However, the only contact I made with life in general was with a couple of pheasants.

Today I want to say a big hello to two new blog readers, new in the sense that they have contacted me, so, 'hi there' to Susie in Liverpool. Welcome aboard the blog bus Susie. Remember to hold on tight, as it can be a little bumpy at times.

A big hello to Gina, who emailed me from Columbia, in South Carolina, USA. Gina is hoping to come and live amongst us here on the Island within the next couple of years. Well Gina, make sure you call and visit me when you come here for a holiday in August.
We seem to be doing well in the USA now; there are about 12 blog readers of which I am aware.

Now, I apologize to our USA readers for this next item as they probably won't know or care what I am talking about. However, I have to get it out of my system before I can move on.

Last night of course was the European Cup final. I think the reason Ronaldo missed his penalty, was because that was the first time he had ever been awarded a penalty without diving for it, and he could not work out what the penalty was for. I also note that the tactic deployed by Manu, to get Drogba sent off in extra time so that he could not take a penalty also worked. I suppose Chelsea will now resort to that old football adage. "Just wait until next year" While Manu will try to convince the rest of us that they are not just the best team in the world, but they are the best team that ever played the game, in the entire history of the world.

Well, it's now Thursday and so far I have gone the entire week without having fish and chips. I know I had kebab and chips on Monday but that hardly counts. So, Mr. and Mrs. Keig, I may well be over to visit you this evening.

I was listening to Robin Gibb of the Bee Gees on the radio yesterday afternoon, and they played the song 'The Lights All Went Down in Massachusetts'. It reminded me of a time when I was at school, and the night the lights all went down in Liverpool. Once a week, we blind kids, well about 6 of us would go on a school outing with the local secondary school down the road, Yew Tree Comprehensive. On this occasion we had all been in to Liverpool city centre for some reason or other on one of the Corporation double decker buses which had been on hire to the school for the day. Anyway, as we all trooped off the bus at the end of the trip outside Yew Tree School, one of the teachers from the sighted school noticed that the light bulbs from upstairs on the bus were missing. He called everyone back onboard the bus, and said that he would not allow any kid to leave the bus until whoever had nicked the light bulbs owned up. After about 10 minutes he decided that none of the blind kids from St. Vincent's would have taken the light bulbs as what good would light bulbs be to a bunch of blind kids? So, all us blind kids trooped off the bus leaving all the sighted kids from Yew Tree comp stuck onboard the bus. If by any chance any of those Yew Tree Comp kids read this blog, can I unreservedly apologize to you now, 40 odd years late, as I was one of the ringleaders from the blind school who stole the light bulbs!

May 23, 2008

I woke this morning from a dream. I was dreaming that I was at sea on my boat the *Silverburn*. I was sailing alone. I don't know how I came to be at sea alone on her, but alone I was. I had no idea in which direction I was sailing so I called out on the VHF several times, but there was no answer. I figured that eventually I would run out of fuel and would just have to sit out there until another vessel came to my aid. Well, another vessel did not come to my aid, instead morning did. Thank goodness for that, I can relax now for it was only a dream.

Sometimes I wish cancer were only a dream. The point is though, a dream is what it is, or will be. It's not a nightmare and one day I will wake from it. I'm not sure yet if the dream will end with another vessel coming to my aid, or I will simply eventually reach the safety of the shore. So long as we carry on and never give up hope, that distant shore gets closer and closer every day.

A few weeks ago, I wrote about a man called J.K. He worked with my Dad emptying coal boats in Castletown. He had a large family and once the boat had been discharged, J.K. headed for the pub with his pay packet and discharged most of it over the bar. He was generous in the extreme to all he met on his way home. As he wobbled from the pub to his house, he would fling packets of crisps, nuts and chocolate bars to all the kids he met on his way home. He probably arrived home with very little left for his own wife and children. J.K. drunk most of his wages, however, he was very generous with the little he had left over. J.K. had a dream though. Every week he would fill in his football coupon. His dream was that one-day he would come up on the pools. When this happened, J.K. was going to continue to look after his friends in wealth, just as he had in relative poverty. With his winnings, J.K. was going to buy a coal boat. Yes, a dirty old coal fired steam driven coal boat. He would sweep out the coal hatches and was going to take all his friends around the world with him on this coal boat. Dad and I were going with him on this extravaganza. I can just imagine J.K. and all his coal boat emptying workmates lying in some posh marina amongst all the millionaire's yachts. I can imagine the thick black smoke from her funnel rising up above the red sails of the splendid yachts. I can picture J.K. sitting on a wharf and asking the champagne swilling yachties if they would like a bite of his one-foot thick cheese sandwiches! I doubt very much that the yacht owners would have offered J.K. a sip of their champagne. However, I am certain that J.K. would have offered them a mug of his strong tea, and a lump of hard cheese. J.K.'S coal boat may well have been in the wrong place. However, as always his heart was not. J.K.'S dream never did come true. But then I guess it was more of an aspiration than a dream.
I wonder just how many other people have sought extreme wealth, so that they can cart their workmates around the world in a dirty old coal boat? I guess it's not the kind of script they come up with in Hollywood. Still, I guess if I had not woken at 5 am this morning from my dream of sailing alone in my boat, I would not have been disappointed if the vessel that eventually came to my rescue, had been J.K. in his coal boat, and oh what a happy trip home it would have been, down there in the dirty old coal hatch amongst all J.K.'S workmates.

Well that is it for another day, people. We have 'the gathering' tonight, with it being Friday. We will gather around the bar and no doubt tell the same stories we tell every week and laugh even louder than we did last week.

May 24, 2008

I'm sorry; I can't blog today, well not properly at any rate. The gathering went on until 1 am this morning when Barbara booted Andrew Qualtrough and his wife Denise out, followed by Michael Quine, who staggered out shortly after them. I am not well. I am going to have my breakfast and go back to bed. See you on Monday.
Bye for now, from a very hung-over Tom, with no news, from the swaying banks of the Silverburn River.

May 26, 2008

It has been an eventful weekend. On Saturday night, Mother was rushed in to hospital. She has a chest infection, which the hospital said could be caused by delayed shock after the death of my father. She has kidney failure due to high blood pressure and diabetes. As things stand this morning, she appears to be OK. She will have a scan on her kidneys tomorrow and hopefully she will be allowed out soon after that.

I have given my assurances (for what they are worth), to '*She*, that must be obeyed', that future Friday night gatherings will not be allowed to get out of hand. Friday's gathering was a sort of one off affair.

Andrew Qualtrough comes and trims our hedges and generally tries to keep our front garden tidy. For this he never takes a penny, he just sort of turns up once a week and gets on with it and has done now for a couple of years. So, every now and then he is invited to one of the gatherings and of course when he does attend, the gathering tends to go on a bit longer than normal. Anyway we shall not see much of Andrew now for several weeks, as he is off to Sri Lanka to study dragonflies.

Anyone that has passed our house will know that we have many odds and sods, teddy bears, fishermen, penguins and so on, stuck on the top of the garden wall. From time to time, some of these little chaps go missing. Well some folk just can't resist knocking them off the wall. However, it is not normally kids that do this, it is much more likely to be rugby teams that have drank too much in the pub around the corner, or corporate coach parties, banks and insurance companies that come down for evenings out that do most damage. Usually the ornaments are discovered the next day by someone in the town and returned to us. Yesterday afternoon, a gentleman knocked on my door to return a teddy bear and a penguin he had found high up in a tree in Poulson Park. Whoever had taken the teddy and penguin for an outing to the park had indeed gone to a lot of trouble to climb the tree and place the Teddy and penguin in such a lofty position. However, not as much trouble as the gentleman who got his extending pole from his van and retrieved both the teddy and penguin and returned them to us. We have in the past received postcards from penguins, sailors and so on, which have left our wall to take a vacation in various parts of the island. We also receive Christmas cards on their behalf, most of which are a bit soggy by the time we find them.

Well now, this morning we are off to visit Mother in the hospital, and then it's on to Peel. I really am going to make a huge effort today though to avoid the chippie. I am now deep into a diet. I only had bacon, eggs, sausages and fried bread today for breakfast. No beans or tomatoes.

On Friday evening my old friend Alan Christian, better known as 'Mousey', the former landlord of the Swan hotel in Ramsey, came down to visit me. It was brilliant to see him again, and once the racing is over and I am back from Clatterbridge, I shall look forward to spending a very pleasant day back up north once again.

May 27, 2008

Today was the first of the commuter steam trains, which are running from Port Erin to Douglas for the next two weeks. I'm glad to say the first train came through Castletown with a reasonable amount of passengers onboard.
Yesterday, as usual on Mondays, off we went to Peel. Now then, I did set something of a record here as it's the first time I can remember ever going to Peel and not calling at the chippie. No, after visiting Mother at the hospital we continued on our merry way to Peel and dined at Moore's Kipper house. We sat outside and I had a very nice kipper bap and Barbara had a crab bap, both served with a cup of tea. What a nice chap Paul Desmond is, the proprietor of Moore's kippers. His kipper house must be one of the very few places left now where you can smoke indoors. That is if you are a herring of course.

I have just enjoyed three pancakes for my breakfast. So, the diet is on course and I am doing well.

Even when I was a kid I used to get very excited about going to Peel. It was so far away from Castletown for one thing. We didn't have a car, so we only got to Peel when a car owning person called. Just the very name 'Pee' to us kids meant ice cream, sandy beaches and kippers. Being the other side of the Island made it more exciting. The only place that was further away was Ramsey, and of course Ramsey had Radio Caroline, and the Mooragh Park, which made it a very exciting place to visit. As a youngster I was always going out in boats with the boatmen of Castletown. However, there was something a bit special about taking a boat on the Mooragh Lake. Surely back in those days, no one visited Ramsey without taking a boat out on the Mooragh, just as you wouldn't visit Peel without having ice cream or a visit to the beach.

I bought my first boat in Peel, called *Sea Dancer*. On our maiden voyage back to Castletown, our starboard engine over heated. This meant we had to continue with only the port engine and as the port engine was new, she could only be run at about a quarter revs, in order to run her in. The trip took around four hours in total to reach Castletown. 'Sea Dancer' turned out to be a disastrous purchase. As we stood looking at her from the quayside bits dropped off her. As fast as we repaired one thing, something else would fall off her or breakdown. I sold her to an engineering chap in Ramsey who did completely rebuild her. However, the last I heard was that, just like an old dog, she had made her way home again, and was now back in Peel.

When I lived in St. Johns, I used to walk in to Peel most days to do the shopping. Sometimes I would return on the bus if the weather was bad. I got to know the bus drivers, and one driver by the name of Jack Quayle, who I think lived in Kirk Michael, became a really good pal. One day I had ordered a new pair of binoculars from Douglas as a surprise for my wife Barbara. I had asked the shop to put the binoculars on the Peel bus and I would meet the bus at St Johns. I made my way out to the bus stop at St Johns at the agreed time to collect the binoculars. I stood waiting at the bus stop and eventually along came the bus. The door opened, and Jack called out. "Tom, they tried to give me a pair of binoculars in Douglas for you, so I told them I didn't think it was very funny, and told them to shove the binoculars where the sun

doesn't shine!" As soon as Jack saw my name, Tom Glassey on the parcel containing the binoculars, and Jack knowing that I am totally blind, he must have thought it was some kind of practical joke. I did manage to get the binoculars eventually; a bus came out to the cottage especially and delivered them to the door.

May 28, 2008

It is a miserable day, if you are only using the weather as a determining factor. Apart from the rain, it is an absolutely fantastic day.

When I was told I had lung cancer four months ago, and I probably didn't have very long to live, then every day became fantastic. The weather hardly had anything to do with it. Of course there were bad days when Dad died, however, at that time I was in mid treatment and in my mind, I simply told Dad to nip and put the kettle on. Well let us hope that the kettle takes a few years to boil. We will have that mug of tea in the future, but I'm not exactly ordering the coffin just yet.

Talking of coffins, I actually have a coffin in my front garden. The coffin is now in the guise of a boat. I asked Ian McKinley, the former custodian at Castle Rushen, to make me a large model of a boat for the front garden. Well the castle is pretty quiet during winter, and I figured Ian was in need of a project. To make the job easier and to save on time, McKinley, Michael Quine and John Bridson from Dalby, sneaked into Arthur Cooper the undertaker's yard, in the dead of night and acquired the lid of a coffin. This coffin lid now forms the hull and structure of the boat that adorns my front garden.

Sticking with coffins and such like, I once had a bit of a run in with a corpse. Yes, it happened to me when I lived in Ramsey. Barbara and I had been on a Friday night out around the town and we were making our way home along Parliament Street. We were just strolling along at around midnight, when Barbara spotted a bloke lying flat out on the pavement. We crossed over to where the guy was lying and crouched down by his side. Everyone just continued to walk past him as if he wasn't there. Barbara and myself, having had a few sherbets ourselves, decided the man was dead and Barbara went to fetch a policeman. There were no mobile phones then, or at least they were not popular. Anyway I remained with the corpse until Barbara came back with help. I knelt down beside the body and lifted his head. I don't know anything about first aid so the corpse was not in good hands. Anyway, the face felt warm and as I lowered him back down on to the pavement, a very angry male voice let rip into the late Friday night Ramsey air, "Will you F---- off!" At that point, fortunately for me, Barbara returned with a policeman who took one look at the guy, and said. "Oh, that is just so and so, he falls down about here most Friday nights on his way home, just leave him be!"

May 29, 2008

I have walked through Poulson Park, and on through Golden Meadow, the old mill and back home. The early morning commuter steam train pulled into Castletown station on time at 8.05. I had to do battle with the Canadian geese on the bank of the Silverburn on my way in to Poulson Park as Barbara had not fed them on time. The fog has now lifted and the sun is shining. The smell of the hawthorn as you walk through the old mill makes it seem like The Almighty has opened up His own perfumery here.

I have not yet had breakfast and I am thinking of heading out to the Flying Club where I will be able to enjoy a full hearty breakfast, well hidden away from all the health policemen. Fear not on my behalf, the health policemen do not read this blog. They are far too busy at this time of day checking on butchers just in case they have sneaked in any black puddings or dripping under the cover of darkness. Don't get me wrong, I am very fond of vegetables, however, 'as well as', rather than 'instead of'.

My dad used to sell vegetables from the back of an old Ford Thames van back in the early 60's. Every Friday evening with Ned Quayle at the wheel, dad riding shotgun, and me and younger brother Kevin in the back, we would set off for Ballasalla. Kevin and I had the job of weighing all the veg out on a pair of old fashioned weighing scales. We only had two weights from what I can remember so, customers could only buy either one pound, 5 pound or 6 pound of vegetables. We did keep a few large stones we had taken from the beach so a stone of spuds literally was a stone of spuds. Not that anyone one was being fiddled as the stone was probably heavier than 14 pounds. Anyway no one complained, and at the end of the round, the lucky customer got the stone in their bag as well.

I have always had a strange relationship with vegetables. I remember traveling back to Castletown from Peel on the bus once. There were only two busses a day then and still is, as far as I know. Anyway there I was on the bus along with my guide dog Escort, a Golden Retriever, and until two ladies got on at St. Johns, Escort and myself were the only two riding the bus. I don't know why the two ladies decided to sit directly in front of me when they had a whole bus to choose from, but that is where they sat, and they plonked their bag of vegetables on the floor under their seat. The next thing I knew was, Escort was nudging my leg, and as I put my hand down to stroke his head, he placed an onion in my hand. I was not sure what to do about the onion. I knew it had come from the ladies bag, however, I figured they probably would not want an onion that had been in Escort's mouth, so I put the onion in my pocket and hoped they had not noticed. A couple of minutes later, Escort's head came up again, only this time with a spud in his mouth. I took the spud from him and placed it with the onion in my pocket, which was now full. Another onion, followed by a carrot, and then more spuds. By the time we reached Ballasalla I had enough vegetables to start my own round up. When we reached Castletown, unfortunately for me, the two ladies were still on the bus. I can't be sure whether they had noticed how light their veg bag had become or not. I decided to say nothing as handing back onions and spuds with dog's teeth marks in them didn't really seem like a good idea, and they may well have found the rest of the veg on the seat behind them. If any of those ladies recall this incident and are reading this blog, I apologize to you now some 20 years on.

Some time later when we moved to Ramsey, I used to go out for Barbara and do the shopping with Escort. I thought for a long time that he was amazing how he always stopped right outside the fruit and veg shop. He would stop there every day, and sometimes it was a little difficult to move him on. Then, I discovered that he was not actually finding the fruit and veg shop for me at all. Each day he would pull up outside the shop and pee all over the flowers and veg that hung outside the shop. It was no more than a doggy peeing place.

May 30, 2008

I have completed the morning walk. I waved to all 33 passengers onboard the steam train as it pulled out of Castletown station at 8:05 a.m. Skipper was extremely well behaved this morning and returned to me every time I called him.

It is a beautiful sunny day and I have had my bacon and egg butty sitting out on the deck in my back garden.

Tomorrow I will be away fishing early and probably won't get back until late. On Monday I am off to Clatterbridge on the first flight out to Liverpool at 7 a.m. This is only for a day in order to have my mask made, and hopefully they will tell me when my three weeks of radiotherapy will commence. I am told I have to have a mask made so that the treatment can be directed accurately to the brain. I am also having radiotherapy to chest. The radiotherapy to my brain is in order to prevent the cancer from spreading there in the future.

I expect that I will be off to Clatterbridge very soon after my return on Monday. There will probably be no blogs while I am away as so far we have not found a method of blogging. However, there is still time yet and Barbara is looking at hotspots for the laptop. Once we know when we are going, we can decide where we are staying and we will then be wiser concerning WiFi hotspots available to us.

Monday is also going to be a big day for Barbara. Barbara is terrified of flying. She wants to come with me on Monday, so she has no choice but to try and put that fear to one side for this event. Fortunately we very seldom leave the Island, and when we have, we have always been able to sail up until now.

Indeed owning to Barbara's fear of flying, we are probably the holders of the longest day trip on record when we went to Norway. We took the *Seacat* to Liverpool, then the train to Newcastle, and finally the boat, which took 24 hours from Newcastle to Norway. We spent 6 hours ashore and returned home. The time to get there took 30+ hours and of course 30 hours to return. Time spent ashore: 6 hours.

Well right now for me it's a case of ‘here we go again’. There have been so many occasions in my life when I have had to begin a journey where I did not know the route and was unsure of the outcome. As a child most of them began with tears and ended with joy. I hated having to go away to school in Liverpool. I was the most homesick kid in history. Of course I wept tears of joy when I left school, however, I have much to thank the nuns of St. Vincent's for today. I did not want to go on to college in Birmingham. But this is what I had to do and we got on with it.

I remember my first day at work at Davis Charlton in Hills Meadow Douglas. I remember thinking to myself on the bus on the way to work "Would I be able to do the job!" Also other little silly things like "Would I be able to find the toilets and so on!" Of course you do manage all these things. However, many years later I found myself sitting on a bus, making my way in from Ramsey to Douglas. It was my first day at the Royal Bank of Scotland, and there I was thinking to myself. "How will I find my way round this place? I wonder where or how easy it will be to locate the toilets!" Then I thought to myself, “Don't be so bloody stupid, Glassey! You have found so many toilets now, and so often in places you didn't know, and been amongst people you didn't know, you came to no harm then so why should you now?” Today it feels a bit like that once again. Here I am going on another journey I did not plan for, or decide to go on! Indirectly it was cancer that forced me off the island back in 1958 when I was 5 years old to attend the blind school in Liverpool. It was through cancer that I had lost my sight. Today it is cancer once again that is sending me over the water, only this time it's a head on fight.

Well people, all I can say right now is, in the past I always managed to locate those toilets and I always managed to find my way around. Just about every stranger I have ever met has become a friend. I hope to return from Clatterbridge in a few weeks’ time with the cancer sorted once again. However, in order to do that, again I must head off to a strange place and learn where the flaming toilets are!!!

June 3, 2008

I have completed the morning walk and enjoyed a full breakfast. Now after a three-day break, I find myself sitting in front of the computer and back to the good old blog once again.

Well yesterday I flew out on the 7a.m. first flight to Liverpool to attend Clatterbridge for a CT scan and arrange my appointment times for my radiation treatment. The old blog came in handy, it seems the blog has reached the staff at Ronaldsway Airport so I breezed my way through the security. We even discovered a few copies of my book on sale airside at Ronaldsway.

Our first headache of the day was going to be Barbara’s fear of flying. Well, it never really materialized. We took off on time and 20 minutes later we were on the ground at Liverpool. Unlike our last flight from Dublin, some 5 years ago, I didn’t even have to hold her down. Our cause was not exactly helped though; when we met up with a French lady who was also going to Clatterbridge. She informed Barbara that she too was terrified of flying in small planes even though she had spent 5 years as an air hostess in her younger days.

We asked Mike, the taxi driver who met us in Liverpool, to drop us at Birkenhead shopping centre rather than at Clatterbridge. My appointment was not until 12 o’clock and we didn’t want to arrive there at 8:30 and hang about for 3 hours or so. We arrived in Birkinhead about 8:30 and the place was totally deserted. I am not kidding you; we could have lain down in the middle of the road and gone to sleep for a couple of hours and would not have got run over. We were both starving so the first thing to do was to find a breakfast place. Unfortunately, the Birkenhead health policemen had beaten me to it and made sure that there was no one trying to sell me a full English breakfast. We eventually had to settle for this thing called a Subway Mega Breakfast. It was utterly disgusting. It was supposed to be a bread roll filled with bacon, egg, sausage and cheese. In fact, I think it had been brought straight from the Dunlop tyre factory’s recycling unit. The sad thing was, had we continued for a few more yards and gone down the stairs we would have found any amount of cafes selling proper food, such as full English breakfast for 2.45, and not a health policeman in site.

We strolled around Birkenhead market for an hour or so then jumped in a taxi and headed down to the ferry terminal to wile away another hour or so. An hour is more than enough time to spend at the Birkenhead ferry terminal. One ferry came and went, and that was about it. There is a little shop there selling a few odds and ends, so I bought the few odds and ends so maybe even they are probably closed today, except it was the ticket office.
At 11 o’clock we made out way out to Clatterbridge in another taxi.

Clatterbridge Hospital is absolutely fantastic. The staff there is beyond belief. Absolutely nothing is too much trouble for them. We decided to have lunch in a cafe there. Unfortunately the health police had obviously visited the cafe we choose and I had to settle for something called a Panini. Now I had never heard of a Panini before and I hope I don’t come across them ever again. I think the Panini must be a close relation of the Subway I had at Birkenhead market. Once again, had we only carried on down the passageway for a few more yards, we would have come across another cafe seemingly undiscovered by the health policemen. There I could have had stuff like chips and what have you.

Anyway I had a CT Scan and got my appointment dates all sorted at Clatterbridge. I will return there on June 16th until July 8th. All I had to do then was to go and sort out some accommodation.

My sister in law Janet, her daughter Beth and my mother in law Jean, all traveled in from St. Helens and Wigan to spend the afternoon with us and help us to find some suitable accommodation. We headed off to a caravan site in Meols, about 10 minutes drive from the hospital. This was at the suggestion of one of the hospital staff. It turned out to be a fabulous little site and I am now waiting for them to ring me back today to confirm whether they have space for us for three weeks. The lady who appeared to be running the site used to visit the Isle of Man and she had met many folks whom I knew, so we chattered for ages. She also cooked and served dinner up for the five of us and would not take one penny for her troubles. Janet then drove us all back to the airport. Our 5:45 flight left on time and we were all back home by about 6:30.

All in all, we had a very enjoyable day out in on the Wirral. I am looking forward to returning to Clatterbidge in two weeks time. The staff there is simply unbelievable. I spent a full hour yesterday morning sitting on the banks of the Mersey. However, it is the most fantastic feeling to wake up once again, on the banks of the Silverburn.

June 4, 2008

We have more or less sorted out my holiday over on the Wirral now. We will stay on a caravan site in a town called Meols, which is on the northern coast of the Wirral.

It was proving to be a bit of a problem getting someone to look after Skipper for nearly a month and Orry the parrot, not to mention the rabbits, hens, guinea pig and over 100 birds in the aviary. So, for my first week I will have the company of my boatman, Chris. For the 3rd week I will have the company of Ray and Pauline Cregeen from Port St. Mary and for the second and forth week, I will be joined by Barbara and Skipper. We even intend to relocate the gathering held normally here on Friday evenings to Meols. Brother Lenny and old sailing friend Michael (heaven only knows who else) will be making trips out to Meols for a couple of days as well.

The whole thing seems to be a better deal than any travel firm could have offered me. I go out to spend a month in the beautiful setting of Meols, all I have to do is turn up at Clatterbridge hospital every day for about 20 minutes. The Government will pay towards my accommodation and for my hospital treatment. I return home at the end of my stay having had a fabulous holiday and rid of lung cancer. Now I ask you, where on Earth could you bet a better deal than that?

I do realize of course, that for anyone who might have to face up to this on their own, it could be, and probably would be, a very different story. If you, or you know of anyone else who is going to be over on the Wirral receiving treatment at around the same time as me then, please get in touch with me and they will be more than welcome to come and join my party at The Park Lane Country Club.

Back in the early 1980's, I took myself off to a place called Abergele in North Wales. The idea was that I should learn all about restoring old furniture and learn how to make rocking cradles. The course was to last for six months, and it seemed like a good idea at the time. My old pal, a former lighthouse keeper, Geordie Adamson, accompanied me out there in order to give me a hand with baggage and what have you. I also had a guide dog named York who weight about 90 pounds. We sailed on the 9o'clock boat for Liverpool, and during the crossing we met up with Johnny Goldsmith, a Port St. Mary man. I don't know where Johnny was heading to, but he dropped his plans and came with us all the way to Abergele, helping us out with dog and bags. Abergele is not very far as the crow flies, from Liverpool. However, it is a devil of a place to get to by train. You have to, or at least you did then, have to board three trains to travel about 40 miles. Also as far as Geordie was concerned, carrying a bloody great Labrador weighing 90 pounds down a moving escalator proved to be something of a challenge. However, it was nothing compared to the challenge that lay ahead of me.

I am not sure what I expected to find on reaching the place where I was to spend the next six months of my course. I was definitely not expecting to be moving into an old folk's home at the age of 32. Someone had got things wrong somewhere along the line.

The place I had been booked into was indeed an old folk's home for blind men and women. To be absolutely fair though to who ever it was at the department of trade and industry, they had booked me into a flat at the top of the building. Well at least I had my own kitchen and bedroom. The trouble was, the only way you could reach my flat was to walk through the home itself and up the main staircase. The residents turned in at about 10 o'clock, and did not take too kindly to me arriving in from the pub at about 11:30 with York's paws sliding on the wooden stairs.

The place where my course was to take place, was a small craft room at the bottom of the building, and all that went on in there really was that a couple of the residents came in their for a couple of hours a day to make rugs and stuff like that. So, why did I stick it out then? Well, when I got over the original shock of where I had landed, and not a lot was going for me on the Island at that time, I decided to stick it out for as long as possible and see what happened.

On my second day I woke and after breakfast I took York down and out in to the front garden. A very familiar voice called out to me from the other side of the railings. It was of course Geordie. Geordie had stayed nearby and had called to see me before he set out on his way back to Liverpool, to catch the boat home. He wanted to give me one last chance to return to the Island with him. I stuck to my guns though and allowed the opportunity to return home pass me by.

I will continue with stories from my stay in Abergele tomorrow. I guess you could call that period of my life a little stressful. My very good friend, Elizabeth Wittmann in Milwaukee, USA, sent me this advice regarding stress, which I thought I would share with you.

A lecturer when explaining stress management to an audience raised a glass of water and asked, "How heavy is this glass of water?" Answers called out ranged from 20g to 500g.
The lecturer replied, "The absolute weight doesn't matter. It depends on how long you try to hold it.

If I hold it for a minute, that's not a problem.

If I hold it for an hour, I'll have an ache in my right arm.

If I hold it for a day, you'll have to call an ambulance

.
In each case, it's the same weight, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes." He continued; "That's the way it is with stress management. If we carry our burdens all the time, sooner or later, as the burden becomes increasingly heavy, we won't be able to carry on. As with the glass of water, you have to put it down for a while and rest before holding it again. When we're refreshed, we can carry on with the burden. So, before you return home tonight, put the burden of work down. Don't carry it home. You can pick it up tomorrow. Whatever burdens you're carrying now, let them down for a moment if you can."

So, my friend put down anything that may be a burden to you right now. Don't pick it up again until after you've rested a while. Here are some great ways of dealing with the burdens of life:

Accept that some days you're the pigeon, and some days you're the statue.

Always keep your words soft and sweet, just in case you have to eat them.

Always wear stuff that will make you look good if you die in the middle of it.

Drive carefully. It's not only cars that can be recalled by their maker.

If you can't be kind, at least have the decency to be vague.

If you lend someone £20 and never see that person again, it was probably worth it.

It may be that your sole purpose in life is simply to be kind to others.

Never put both feet in your mouth at the same time, because then you wont have a leg to stand on.

Nobody cares if you can't dance well. Just get up and dance.

Since it's the early worm that gets eaten by the bird, sleep late.

The second mouse gets the cheese.

When everything's coming your way, you're in the wrong lane.

Birthdays are good for you. The more you have, the longer you live.

You may be only one person in the world, but you may also be the world to one person.

Some mistakes are too much fun to only make once.

We could learn a lot from crayons... Some are sharp, some are pretty and some are dull. Some have weird names, and all are different colors, but they all have to live in the same box.

A truly happy person is one who can enjoy the scenery on a detour.

PEOPLE MAY NOT REMEMBER EXACTLY WHAT YOU DID, OR WHAT YOU SAID, BUT THEY WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER HOW YOU MADE THEM FEEL.

June 5, 2008

This morning I went walking on Castletown beach in the rain. It is still raining as I write and according to the men at Ronaldsway, that is the way it will remain until late this afternoon. By this evening it will be fine. The weather seems to reflect life in general. How often did you get up and get off to a bad start? How often do you hear someone say, "Take no notice, I'm having a really bad day"? It doesn't have to stay that way though and often doesn't. Just like the weather, good fortune, luck, or your own mind state can change a bad day into a good one.

Yesterday, I was telling you about my stay in Abergele in North Wales back in the early 80's. Having arrived at what turned out to be an old folks home with a bit of a craft room in which I was suppose to learn my trade, my plight did seem pretty desperate. My pal Geordie had now returned home to Port St. Mary and I settled down in my flat at the top of the building. For a few days I came down to the craft room and joined in with the rug and stool making. There was another chap about my age who was a resident there. His name was Glynn and he had not long lost his sight and had been sent to this home to be rehabilitated. Until he had lost his sight, he had spent his time on a farm in mid Wales. He had been at the home for about 6 months before my arrival. I spent my first week sorting out the local pubs and chippies. Once this was done I dragged Glynn along with me. In his entire six months he had not been outside the home, now what kind of rehabilitation was that? Glynn was soon not only going out to the pubs at night, but also singing and entertaining in some of them on weekends.

We seldom went out during the week, however, on Friday and Saturdays we would make the best of it and let our hair down. I had been walking on something of a tight rope, arriving back at the home at around 11 pm. after visiting friends in the village, but we really pushed the residents to the limit when both myself and Glynn arrived home at midnight or 1am with guide dog York sliding all over the slippery stairs, me tramping up them and Glynn still singing his bloody head off. I know we were in Wales and the home was full of elderly Welsh residents, but you would be amazed at just how unpatriotic the senior citizens of North Wales became when they heard, 'Land of My Fathers', or 'There'll Be a Welcome in the Hillside'. Complaints were made to the matron, and my exact reasons for becoming a resident of the home questioned. None-the-less, I was now actually enjoying myself there. I was having a wonderful time in the village. The locals were brilliant, I was having dinner at someone's house in the village most Sundays.. A plan therefore had to be hatched to keep the residents happy. I had to get on their good side. Trouble was, how and what could I do for them or bring to them, what they didn't have before I arrived.

Inspiration turned up one day as I was having a smoke in the garden. One of the residents asked me if he could have a cigarette. "Of course you can." I replied. He told me they were not allowed to smoke in the home and because they did not get out themselves they could not buy them. A member of staff used to do their shopping for them each day. However, cigarettes were banned from the shopping list. I must admit, I did feel a bit like Father Christmas as I walked

round the home on the first day of the revolution asking them all what kind of fags they wanted and how many. If I felt like Father Christmas on that first morning, I felt more like the scolded cat that evening once matron had finished with me. Thereafter, I had to be more discreet, this meant going round the home at night time and knocking on the doors, taking orders and delivering the goods by the same method. The plan was a brilliant success though. Now I could do no wrong as far as the residents were concerned. Myself, York and Glynn were free to party all night long if we choose. The trouble now was, a state of war now existed between the residents and the matron, and the committee who ran the home. The guy, who actually owned the home, had an office in Bangor, several miles from Abergele. Once he heard of my antics, I was duly sent for. I was more than happy to go and argue the case for my new-found elderly friends. He did not come over to me as a particularly pleasant chap and basically made it clear to me that my little shopping trips for the residents had to stop. I explained that they were in an old folk's home and not a bloody prison but this cut no ice. I pleaded for a cigarette machine to be placed there, but this also was declined. He didn't actually say, "If you don't stop your shopping trips you will have to leave", however, I am sure that was on his agenda. That in its self would not have bothered me as I only had a couple of weeks left and I was concerned that once I had gone, my pal's supply of fags and beer would dry up. As a parting shot I explained to him that if he did not back down regarding the residents, I would talk to local newspapers and the radio station regarding the conditions of the home. The home itself was well run. It was warm and comfortable. However, there were far too many rules, and the food was terrible. The food mattered little to me as I looked after myself in the flat. Some of the residents though had started wander up to my flat to join me for the evening meal. I am no great cook by any means, but I could and did serve up better meals than sprouts and chips which was the kind of thin they were served up in their own dining room.

We shall continue with my account of my stay in Abergele tomorrow.

June 6, 2008

It's a beautiful day. This morning I shall head out to the Flying Club for breakfast. I am just back from my morning walk, this time along the banks of the Silverburn. I am thinking seriously of lifting Skipper's ASBO, as he has not chased anyone now for about a month. However, maybe I can't quite trust him just yet and I will wait until I return from Clatterbridge. If he behaves himself over there and does not terrorize the caravan site or add anyone on Clatterbridge's patient list, then I shall lift the ASBO on his return.

Well, now to the third and final chapter on my time spent at the old folk's home in Abergele North Wales back in the early 80's
.
I guess I did not exactly do myself any favours with matron by supplying the elderly residents with cigarettes and tins of beer, although I must say, I did not go on a fag and booze run on their behalf, I simply went shopping for them each morning and brought back whatever they asked for. The gas fire in my room also got me off to a bad start with matron. I simply could not figure how to get it working, so, one night in the local pub, I met a guy and after having a few beers with him I told him about my gas fire and how I could not get it to work. He seemed a very nice guy and offered to pop round the next day to sort it out. He was indeed a man of his word and at noon the following day he turned up at the home to fix my gas fire. The police turned up at the home about half an hour later and promptly arrested the most wanted man in North Wales. Well, how was I to know that this guy was a hunted criminal? My plea to the matron that I had in fact done the people of North Wales a huge favour, as I managed to find a guy the police obviously couldn't locate and rid the community of this man. It fell on deaf ears. I got away light I suppose with just a warning to be more careful of the type of people I brought back to the home. Well yes, I did get off to a bit of a dodgy start at the old folks home in Abergele. However, things did eventually settle down, and I went on to spend 6 of the happiest months of my life there. I did learn how to make cradles, although that was through an old man I met in the village, and there still might be one or two of them kicking around the island. I did try to get the homeowners to put a cigarette machine in the home for the residents, and they were considering this request when I left. Whether it happened, I really don't know. I met some fantastic people whilst I was there, and on the day I left I will never forget the small group of school children who stood on the pier at Llandudno and sung, "There'll Be a Welcome in the Hillsides" as the *Manxman* pulled away and returned the troublesome warrior back to the Isle of Man.

Once again I am to leave the Island and head off on an unknown adventure. A week on Monday I head for Clatterbridge. I promise I will not be nipping out to bring the patients cigarettes or booze. This time it will probably be the other way round only without the cigarettes. I turned up in Abergele all those years ago with a highly trained guide dog 'York'. This time I am turning up on a caravan site with a wild as hell collie. I cannot be sure what exactly lies ahead of me because these are uncharted waters. I have absolutely no doubt that just like all my other forages over the water, I will return all the better for my experience. I am about to dip my toe in the deep font of human kindness once again. I also hope that I too will leave something behind, even if it is only a packet of fags and a couple of tins of beer. I hope like me, they will throw the fags away, however that must always remain their choice.

June 7, 2008

Today we decided to walk around Langness. I have not walked the whole Langness Peninsula since I became ill last October. I did not know then that it was in fact cancer I was fighting, as cancer was not diagnosed until February. I do recall trying to walk Langness back in February, and only getting about 200 yards before having to turn back to the car park. Today, for the first time since Mr. Cancer came along, I have managed to get all the way around in about the same time as I used too. I encountered choughs, stonechats, skylarks, oystercatchers and even a curlew. I think a walk around Langness early in the morning is as good as, and has the same positive effect on me, as a dose of chemotherapy.

For those of you around the world who are not familiar with Langness, it is a small peninsula that runs out to sea for about a mile in the south of the Island on the east coast. It forms the northern boundary of Castletown Bay, and the southern boundary of Derbyhaven Bay. I am told the Manx word "Langness" translates to "Long nose" in English.
I am sitting here contemplating whether to have a bacon and sausage bap with brown sauce for breakfast, or whether head out to the Flying Club again for one of their full fantastic breakfasts, and the finest latté coffee I have ever tasted. Right, that's it! The Flying Club wins! If you are reading this blog Mark and Lara, get the frying pan on. I shall be there shortly.

Well the TT is over again for another year folks, and now the mass exodus begins, although this year I don't think there is a mass anything. I know that Government stats will shortly reveal how successful the TT has been. However, I have been surprised how easy it has been this year to book a meal or get in to places. We took ourselves off for a pub lunch on Thursday and we were the only people in the pub. I have known the pubs to be busier back in the old days, when they were closed on Sundays and only illegal drinking was taking place.

Last night the gathering took place, and I am pleased to report that everyone when home sober.

I cannot go fishing today as my boatman Chris is playing with a doughnut. Someone in a fast boat is towing him from Port St. Mary to Port Erin. Well to be fair to the lad, he did offer me a ride on the doughnut but I declined. I might well end up mucking about with a doughnut later this morning, but it will be one of Ramsey Bakery's, and I will probably have less salt on mine than Chris will have on his.

I want to say a big hello to Julie and Malcolm now before I forget. They are new blog readers and dwell in Castletown. Also I would love to know how a copy of Manx Tails made its way to Brazil. Last night I received an email from Declan O Sullivan, provider of my expensive whiskey, who had just read my blog in the Manx tails magazine in Brazil. Strangely enough, there does appear to be something about Brazil. The day after I published my book, which was only a local publication, the very first telephone call I received from a reader, was from a gentleman who had just read the book in Brazil. My book was not even in the shops over here at the time and I never asked him how the heck he got hold of it. If he is reading this blog now, then maybe he will email me and explain. Well, a long shot maybe. But blimey, if he can get hold of a book that is not even in the shops over here, then surely finding my blog would be an absolute doddle for him.

I said that I believe that the TT numbers are down this year. I am sure the TT is safe for the time being folks. However, I think all of us have concerns when the government is at the helm. I enclose this warning below which has come my way thanks to my good friend Roger Waterworth.

Dakota tribal wisdom says that when you discover you are riding a DEAD HORSE, the best strategy is to dismount. However, in some organizations like governments, universities, hospitals, large companies, school districts, etc., we often try other strategies like:

• Buying a stronger whip.
• Changing riders.
• Saying things like "this is the way we have always ridden."
• Appointing a committee to study the horse.
• Arranging to visit other sites to see how they ride dead horses.
• Increasing the standards for riding dead horses.
• Appointing a tiger team to revive the dead horse.
• Creating a training session to increase our riding ability.
• Comparing the state of dead horses in today's environment.
• Pass a resolution declaring the "this horse is not dead."
• Blaming the horse's parents.
• Harnessing several dead horses together for increased speed.
• Declaring that, "No horse is too dead to beat."
• Providing additional funding to raise the horse's performance.
• Do a study to see if contractors can ride it cheaper.
• Declare the horse is "better, faster, and cheaper" dead.
• Form a quality circle to find uses for dead horses.
• Revisit the performance requirements for horses.
• Say this horse was procured with cost as an independent variable.
• Promote the dead horse to a supervisory position.
• Reclassifying the dead horse as 'living impaired'.
• Hiring outside contractors to ride the dead horse
• Do PDSA to see if lighter riders improve performance
• Declaring that as the dead horse does not have to be fed, it is less costly, carries lower overhead, and therefore contributes substantially more to the mission of the organization than do some other horses
• Rewriting the expected performance requirements for all horses

June 9, 2008

I have just enjoyed mackerel on toast for breakfast after my morning walk along the Silverburn.

I spent all afternoon yesterday trawling around Castletown Bay looking for callig and mackerel. I can promise you that all the callig and mackerel that went for an afternoon swim yesterday afternoon, returned home safely.

A couple of years ago, my financial advisor advised me that I should make an investment over a five year period in a certain building society. I took his advice, and of course the investment has now gone a bit belly up. So, I got myself a new financial advisor who phoned me up on Saturday morning and told me to place a bet on the 3:20 at Mussleborough. If anyone comes across a horse that answers to the name 'West With the Wind', please let me know, as it owes me £50. Never mind, at least I did recover the £50 in the Derby. I don't normally bet on horses or anything else for that matter, which is just as well.

Talking of horses, my Dad was very much a horseman. Back in the 1940's he worked on the Cringle reservoir using a horse and cart to carry stone. I remember back in my 20's when I lived at home on Janet's Corner, Dad had a field on the Douglas road, about a quarter of a mile towards the airport from the Janet's Corner housing estate. For a few months he kept a small Welsh Cob pony he was breaking in for someone else. We also kept goats at the time, pigs, a couple of calves and some chickens. Anyway I would go up there to milk the goats and of course talk to 'Goblin' the pony. Sometimes I would bring Goblin back to the house with me. To do this I held him on a rope and walked him down the pavement to our house, which was the first house on the estate. Crossing the main Douglas road being blind with a pony on the end of a rope was sometimes a tad tricky, however, we managed. The fun really kicked in when I was approaching the bus stop on the main road at Janet's Corner. I am told that one or two elderly residents of Janet's Corner, who were stood at the bus stop, actually reached the qualifying 100 metre sprint time for the Olympics when they saw me approaching with Goblin on the end of my rope. Most folk step aside when they see and blind person and their guide dog approach, I can tell you they travel at super sonic speed when they see a blind man and his horse approaching.

Well folks this time next week I will be at Clatterbridge. Young Chris, my boatman is coming with me for the first week. When I am not being treated at the hospital, we intend to explore the river Dee and the Mersey. I don't think it is going to be possible to keep the blog going from the Wirral. However, I will be updating you at weekends. I must say a big thank you to Wendy here. Wendy has offered to write the blog for me from her office in London. It would mean me

calling her by phone though each day and I don't think I could write the blog off the cuff in that format. None-the-less it is extremely kind of you Wendy to offer your services.

June 10, 2008

Yesterday we went on our usually pilgrimage to Peel and of course I got my fish and chips. Next week I hope to carry out a full survey of the fish and chip shops on the Wirral.

I sat on Peel breakwater yesterday and enjoyed a cup of coffee with the father of Wendy, who is a regular blog reader from London. I fired off a text message to Wendy as I chatted with her father. It got me thinking about the telephone, and how it has progressed through the years.

Back in my childhood on the Janet's Corner housing estate in the late 50's and early 60's, no one I knew had a telephone in their house. When one or two telephones did appear later, it was a sign that you had really made it, or you were a snob, depending on your point of view. When Friday night came along and those wages were burning a hole in your pocket, locating your mates was not as easy as firing off a text message. However, it didn't really seem to be a problem, you knew which pub they drank in or where they would be hanging out. The first words you uttered on your arrival at the bar would be. "Has so and so been in yet?"
I recall a certain landlord in a pub, then known as the Duck's Nest, who secured my services as a telephonist long before the Royal Bank of Scotland came along. Because mobiles had not yet been invented, the only thing wives could do to try and locate their husbands, was to ring the pub itself and ask the landlord if their husband was there. The landlord of the Duck, Albert Jones, not wanting to lie to folks asked me if I would mind answering the phone on Saturday evenings. The wife of whoever would almost certainly ask me if Jack or Peter was there, and all I had to say in absolute honesty was. "No love, I haven't seen him today!" Well that got Albert off the hook for at least a couple of hours. Mind you, I guess this caper has sort of backfired on him just a little. I did once have a bet with him. I can't remember what the bet was about, and it was only for a pint. The bet took place some 35 years ago and I never did buy Albert that pint. To this day whenever we meet he asks me for that pint, and I give the same reply each time. "I will buy you that pint Albert, the next time I see you!"

It's just as well we did not have mobile phones in those days. For some of us it was difficult enough trying to come to terms with the ordinary landline type phone. My Dad was never a technical sort of person. However, one of ours neighbours, George would call round to our house every Friday evening so that Dad might help him to use the phone box on the estate to call his daughter in Douglas. Like I said, Dad was not very hot on telephones and Dad and George trying to make a phone call was better than anything on the telly. One day George came round at his usual time and Dad was not in. So, the job of assisting him to call his daughter fell to my brother Kevin and I. We escorted George to the phone box and the mission began. George thought the number of your house automatically became your telephone number. We tried explaining to George that this was not the case. We dialed the operator for George and explained that all he had to do was tell the operator Linda's address and she will find the number or put you through. Kevin and I stood outside the box and the conversation between George and the operator went something like this: George in his broad Manx accent, "Now then yesser can ya put me through to our Linda, down in Douglas, just cant think of the name of the street now, but number 14, well could be 13, just a couple of doors down from the bus driver fella that married thingies daughter. You know thing, from over Peel way, the postman that had an affair with Crellin the policeman's daughter. What do yer mean ya need more information? For God's sake ya must know our Linda, gal with the blond hair, drinks down in the Wheatsheaf every Friday night and always sits in the far corner there with what's her name. You know, the daughter of thing, who used to work for the quare fella up North somewhere! Come on now love, stop messin' about now and put me through, I ain't got all flaming night for this lark!" Well I can 't remember if George did get through to his daughter that night and Heaven only knows how my dad managed this rather tricky call out every Friday evening.

June 11, 2008

I woke up at 3a.m this morning and the dawn chorus was at full pelt. At present the birds have got a long day. They are on the go from 3am now until around 10 pm. At least next week the days will begin to shorten for them.
I was talking about telephones yesterday and I have not finished rabbiting on about them yet as I owe the telephone a great deal. For the last 15 years I have made a living from answering the telephone both at the Royal Bank of Scotland, and through my own business, Island Office Minder. Even 100 years after its invention, the telephone still has a very profound effect on our lives. It is normally through the telephone that we hear of a birth, or a death. Should you be lucky enough to win the lottery this week, it will probably be through the telephone that you will hear of your win. Like wise, if tragedy strikes it will probably be the telephone that will be the chosen method of conveying the news to you.

As a child, the telephone played a very important part of my life. When I was at the blind school in Liverpool, we were only allowed one telephone call a week from home. That call had to be made on a Saturday evening between 6 and 7, and had to last no longer than 3 minutes. The 3-minute time limit placed on me by the nuns was futile really, as I was only allowed 3 minutes for my two and sixpence to the Isle of Man. The duty nun used to stand outside the school phone box pacing up and down the passageway outside, her long string of rosary beads jangling as she walked. I was dying to tell Mother or Father I wanted to come home, but dare not as every word was monitored.

I have written in many previous blogs about my time spend with my Uncle Sean in Tipperary Ireland. He had a pub in Templemore, and I would usually go down and spend sometime with him during the summer months. Uncle Sean was one of the kindest men I have ever met, although it has to be said, he was just a little on the eccentric side. Every night, once he had closed the pub he would sit and smoke his pipe in the chair, and then he would head up the stairs to bed taking the radio and the phone with him, along with his dog and gun. He would then lock himself in his bedroom, which was next to mine. My bedroom door didn't even have a handle, let alone a lock. For some reason he always placed an electric blanket on my bed. However, there wasn't a power point in my room. The electric blanket was on a long lead and plugged into a socket in his room, which of course was locked. The only way I could reduce the heat in my bed was to throw the electric blanket on the floor. Uncle did all or most of his own electrics and his wiring left much to be desired. If you bounced on the bed or simply turned over a bit too quickly, the lights would come on and off. Just by putting the kettle on usually meant that on came, the telly, the washing machine, and probably his electric razor would start up in the front room. I recall one night when he had gone to bed along with his telephone, dog and gun. After chucking my electric blanket out on to the floor, I turned over hoping to get some well-earned sleep. About an hour later the silence was shattered by a very loud bang. I leapt from my bed believing that Uncle had shot himself, but of course I couldn't get into his room because of the locked door. Neither could I phone for assistance because he had the phone. With the dog barking like hell, I hammered on his bedroom door. Suddenly, the dog stopped barking, and a loud, semi drunk Irish

voice yelled out, “Be Jaysus, will ye go back to bed, I’m after turning over in the bed and shooting a hole in the mattress”. Tomorrow I will tell you about the time he turned his gun on a couple of deliverymen.

June 12, 2008

When I was a kid and at home on school holidays, I would always be counting the days that were left before my return to the convent in Liverpool. When the last day came, I would try and stay awake all night in a vain attempt to try and make the last day last as long as possible. Sleep would eventually overwhelm me and I would wake up the following morning bitterly disappointed that I had not managed to remain awake. Then there was the boat to Liverpool. At least it was a four-hour trip and despite my tiredness I would be determined not to fall asleep during the crossing. Every minute had to be savoured. I didn’t always manage this either and I can remember waking up as we were going up the Mersey and just a few minutes away from tying up. I would be in tears because I had slept my way through the last few hours of something very close to home.

When I was very young, I used to hope or pray that the tide would go out when the boat was halfway across the Irish Sea leaving all the passengers stranded, and we would all be able to climb out and walk home. So, here I am some 40 odd years on, planning yet another trip across the Irish Sea. I have no doubt that I will be homesick yet again. I get homesick just buying a damn boat ticket.

Of course this time it will be on the *Seacat*. The *Seacat* just doesn’t do it for me though. The old *Isle of Man* boat felt like it was part of the Isle of Man, the timber decks, the smell of ropes and kippers. Most of the crew had Manx accents. I am not a nationalist, I just love home. The *Seacat* has none of those things; it is more like a bus than a boat and just a means of transport. I don’t even think they sell Bovril! Any oldies like me will know what I mean by that. They always had Bovril on sale from the buffet bar on the shelter deck of the old IOM boats.

I guess the one good thing that came out of going away to school in Liverpool was the coming home again. At the end of each school term I counted down the days, just as I did at the end of the holidays. This time though, on the final night, I wanted to get to sleep as quickly as possible so that morning would soon be with us. Going home day was a really special day in my life, much more so than a birthday or Christmas day, this time the four hours sailing time on the IOM boat could not pass quickly enough. Stepping ashore onto the quay in Douglas was just like stepping right in to Heaven. Because my brothers and friends had never experienced the hardship and sadness of leaving home, they never experienced the thrill of returning home. It is going to be exactly the same this time round some 40 odd years on.

Only when you have been so very ill and close to death, can you really appreciate being fit and well again! No, I will not be trying to stay awake all night on Sunday. Nor will I be counting the minutes on the *Seacat* on Monday morning. I will be looking forward to returning in four weeks time fitter and better than I am now. I shed many a tear as a young boy having to attend the convent in Liverpool. However, I have much to be grateful for to the nuns and teachers of St. Vincent’s, and to the people of Liverpool.

Today I have even more reason to be grateful to the doctors and nurses at Clatterbridge, and the people of the Wirral. Yes, leaving home is always a sad business, but it is necessary if you want to experience the joy of returning. When you are ill, life can seem pretty desperate, and maybe not even worth living. However, once you are through the illness, and even if your recovery leaves you a tad short of what you were before, life is so much sweeter, and you will not just breathe every morsel of fresh air as you did before, but savour it and enjoy it like it like a gourmet meal.

June 13, 2008

Mary came home from school in tears. She explained to her mother that she had been punished for something she didn’t do. “That’s terrible,” said her mother. I’m going straight up to your school to have a word with your teacher. “What was it you didn’t do?” “My homework,” said Mary.

Well they say the old ones are the best, and this story reminds me of the time I had my pocket money stopped for a week back in my boarding school days. When my teacher asked me one morning for my homework, I replied “I have not done any homework because there was no boat to the IOM last night”. Was my smart alec answer worth four shillings? No! No amount of schoolboy laughter was worth a week’s allowance. The trouble was, I really liked that teacher. We got on really well and I probably got off lighter than anyone else would have done for the same thing.

Why am I going on about homework? Well for some reason I woke up this morning with homework in my head. I think it’s probably because my trip over to Clatterbridge is now just three days away.

I used to think when I smoked, that I would be able to pack in anytime. I would pack in when the coughing started, or when I began to have breathing difficulties. I guess that was doing my homework. The trouble is, I didn’t see lung cancer coming, and my homework was totally inadequate. Believe me, there is nothing you can do that will prepare you for lung cancer. If you kick the habit now, then even if you are unlucky enough to fall in to cancer’s clutches, at least you will be able to say that you did everything you could to avoid it, and you won’t have any pangs of guilt regarding your treatment. My homework was inadequate. Your homework need not be. Sling it, that’s the best homework you can do. Good luck to you, and more importantly good health.
Of course if you enjoy a smoke and you’re not afraid of catching lung cancer, then good luck to you also. I will hang on to my Clatterbridge brochures as you will probably be in need of them to at some point in the future.

Well I shan’t bang on about smoking any more. When I packed in, I said to myself, I don’t want to be one of those former smokers who keeps banging on and on about smoking, so sorry smokers if I have gone on a bit. Of course I still am a smoker, I suppose it’s just that I haven’t had one now for 8 months.

Today being Friday means that the gathering will take place this evening. Tonight will probably be the last of the gatherings for sometime although we are going to relocate one of the gatherings to the campsite in Meols. I am now going to start packing my bags for my little jaunt to pastures new. I will blog tomorrow folks, and then after that I really don’t know when my next one will be. Next week the intention is that Barbara will do the blog on my behalf, although I don’t know if she will do so every day.

June 15, 2008

Well yes I don't normally blog on Sundays. However, I failed to do it yesterday, and therefore this will be the last one before I go to Clatterbridge tomorrow. I am afraid the damn gathering got out of hand again on Friday night, hence the lack of a blog yesterday.

Ian McKinley, the former custodian of Castle Rushen, turned up from the world of Smeale where he now lives. Andrew Qualtrough also put in an appearance prior to his lizard-hunting jaunt to the South of France. Sarah, who bought 'Island Office Minder' from me and is making a much better fist of it than I did, also turned up along with a Viking journalist from Norway. Thank heavens she came, as she carted everyone away at around 1:30 a.m., despite the fact that Barbara had long since gone to bed. Of course Chris Callow, my boatman and Michael Quine were there, and not forgetting Ray and Pauline Cregeen. Rumour has reached me that after leaving me, the gathering reconvened at another dwelling and continued until 4 a.m.

Judging by the list of contacts I now have over on the Wirral, it would seem we are in for a mighty gathering over there. Well people, I shall be on tomorrow's 7.30 *Seacat* to Liverpool. That is provided the Liverpool linkspan is working and nobody sneezes on the Victoria Pier causing the wave height to be too high for the *Seacat*. While I am gone I think Barbara, who at this minute is cooking breakfast, will be blogging on my behalf. I doubt she will manage it every day, but at least she will keep you all updated and might even offer some bloggings of her own. I hope that when I return I will be fully fit again, and the blogs will take a new turn, as I will be writing as a former cancer sufferer. Not that I have suffered that much, and with my luck, cancer will probably be replaced with chickenpox or something like that.

Anyway folks, for now I will say farewell to you all and I will be back on the scene the second week in July, all being well. I will try and fire off the odd blog when I come home at weekends. I won't have a computer with me over on the Wirral, at least not one that talks and has a Braille display so blogging from the Wirral is not an option for me. Thank you to Nathan who has emailed me from Chester, and I hope to meet up with you mate while I am there.

June 17, 2008

I thought I would do an update on how things are going for Tom across.

He left for Liverpool yesterday morning and eventually got there after a slow *Seacat* trip. He still made it in time for his appointment, with a little to spare. His young boatman, Chris Callow has gone with him and is looking after him admirably.
Tom said the mask fitting wasn't pleasant, but he coped. He had to hold his hands above his head for around 45 minutes and he found that tiring, along with the machine turning him all different ways. He checked the time on his watch at some point of the proceedings and they had to do a whole procedure all over again. It's quite an easy thing for him to do with his hands above his head, as he would have just flicked the watch face off his watch and felt the Braille. Either way, he got a telling off.

The Caravan is good and the people onsite are really friendly. He told a story the other week of how a man turned a water hose on the whole pub that he was in, in Manchester some years ago. Amazingly, the lady who runs the clubhouse at the caravan site in Meols, was the landlady of the pub at the time and remembered the incident well.

Today Tom and Chris hunted about for somewhere to have breakfast. They eventually found a place at Birkendhead Market after touring three towns. Then it was an hour's trip on the Mersey Ferry, more to eat at the Albert Dock, followed by another boat trip. This one was somewhat different as they decided to go on the Yellow Duck that tours the docks. They were on with a load of school children and I do believe they joined in the actions and calling of 'Splish, Splash, Splish, Splash' as the boat started off.
He then went to Hoylake to see if he could buy a new fishing rod in the fishing shop there. They didn't have one that he liked, so the man said he would give him a shout if a more suitable one came in as he lived in the next caravan to the one Tom and Chris are in.

Last night they had fish and chips from Hoylake and tonight he had... Yes, Fish and chips from Meols. I have had a quiet word and he has promised they will have Chinese instead tomorrow. You never know, he may find the odd bit of veg in it to shock his system.

He has had a great day, is quite tired now and settling down to listen to the Archers and football with a can of John Smith's.

Tomorrow the treatment starts and he intends checking out Liverpool One afterwards. The side effects of the treatment probably won't kick in until next week.

My mother came to stay with me this week. She got on the boat that Tom got off and will return on Friday where they will pass like ships in the night again, as Tom makes his journey home for the weekend.

I will write again when time permits and I have an inkling of what to say.

Bye for now, from Tom's wife on the banks of the Silverburn River, missing him like mad.

June 18, 2008

Well today the radiotherapy commenced. Tom will probably be more informative when he returns, but the gist appears to be that the mask that was fitted on Monday was very tight and Tom had a choice of going with the treatment to his head, or delaying it a day. He decided to go with it and the mask will be adjusted for tomorrow, so it won't be quite so uncomfortable.

The treatment lasted about 45 minutes and he is feeling fine. He has been told to expect the side effects in about 2 weeks time.

After he treatment he went over to Liverpool again with Chris and did a bit of shopping at Liverpool One. Apparently I am the owner of a Garmin GPS system. He bought one today in Currys. That will be handy. The last time I drove across, Tom took his talking GPS and it was a nightmare. We got off the boat in Heysham at 11.00 pm and we had a hotel booked in Lancaster. At 12.45 am, after driving around the one way system dozens of times, I stopped by a taxi rank and gave a taxi driver the money to let me follow his cab to the hotel. I was tired and pretty grouchy and I'd driven past the street the hotel was in every time I circumnavigated Lancaster. The problem being that Tom's Sat Nav didn't have a visual

display and it would say "you are 400 yards to blah, blah, you are 200 yards etc", then the next thing would be "you are off route". It never told me how to get back on route, just that I was basically lost again.

Tom loves his GPS, even if I wouldn't use it again for directions. As we drive along it tells him where we are, any points of interest etc and it makes a boring ride for someone who can't see, very interesting. He also uses it on his boat. He is very knowledgable about the sea, the tides, the danger points, wind direction etc. and will leave many a sighted person standing. He has all the way points entered for Castletown Bay and surrounding areas. I can't say any more on how it helps him at sea as I'm a landlubber myself. I would only be interested in going on the boat if it was a calm day and I would get a trip to the Sugarloaf Rock or to see the seals. I just love the birds at Sugarloaf. It's like finding yourself right in the middle of a David Attenborough documentary.

Anyway, I'm waffling now. Tom's other buy of the day apparently was a Yellow Duck. No, not the sort that goes in the bath. It's a model of the boat he went on yesterday. I'm not sure how it will look amongst his scratch built Steam Packet models and the *Star of India*.

He also managed a night without fish and chips, but I don't think king prawn curry and fried rice have really set him on the path to a healthy diet.

That's it for now from Barbara on the extremely wet and windy banks of the Silverburn, counting the days.

June 21, 2008

I am just back for a flying visit. I came over on last night's slow craft *Viking*, and I will return, Steam Packet willing, on Monday morning.

Well after a week, we are progressing nicely I guess. I crossed over to Liverpool last Monday morning with my boatman young Chris Callow, on the so-called *Super Seacat*. All I can say about this vessel is, she isn't very super and she isn't very fast.

Our voyage began with an announcement explaining that owing to a broken gear, the crossing time would be 3 hours 20 minutes, roughly about the same passage time as the 1930's *Lady of Mann*. This was promptly followed by a second announcement welcoming us onboard the Steam Packet's fast craft.

For breakfast I decided on a fresh Ramsey bakery baguette with sausages. The baguette was not buttered and the sausages tasted like a couple of old burnt Steam Packet rope. To add insult to injury I was charged £4.50. I returned to my seat feeling as if I had just purchased a pig farm and a bakery. The Steam Packet was once a company that we Manxies held dearly. Back in the 60's and 70'S, the Isle of Man Steam Packet was as well known and respected by the sea going folk on the Mersey, as Cunard, the CPR line, the Blue Funnel line and all the other well-known deep sea shipping companies. As A Manxman the Packet was a shipping company to be proud of. Today, it is nothing more than a ragbag of a company, but enough said on that matter.

Now down to business. Clatterbridge is an absolutely fantastic hospital. The staff is out of this world. It simply is a joy to pass through this great hospital. The treatment is nothing like what I expected. It basically involves lying on a hard steel bed that then shoots around 5 feet up in the air. Then there is lots of noise. Things come and hover over your head and arms appear to come up on each side of you. There are lots of clicks and bangs and you have to lie very still with your arms held up behind your head for around 20 minutes, which is a little tiring. Once this treatment is over the radiation on my brain begins. This involves a mask being pulled tight over my face although the mask is more like a helmet. It is pulled tightly by four straps behind your head and fastened down to the bed. You now are unable to move your head in any direction, and although breathing is a little difficult, it is just about possible. Once the mask is in place and you are secured to the bed, the nurses all leave the room, and up in the air you go. All the clicks and bangs begin again. Thankfully the treatment to the head does not take anything near as long as the treatment to the chest, so, it is all over in about ten minutes. They simply can't do enough for you at Clatterbridge. It really is the most fantastic hospital and an absolute credit to the health service.

The caravan site is quiet and about 8 miles from the hospital. The fish and chips I have had over here, I have to say are poor.

I will blog again tomorrow hopefully, time permitting and tell you all about my trips on the Mersey and the town I am staying in on the Wirral, called Meols.

June 22, 2008

Blimey what a wild day it is. A little while ago I returned from a walk on the beach with Barbara and Skipper. Well, I didn't walk actually because when I got there, I discovered I still had my slippers on. Maybe all this radiation to my brain is getting to me.

Tomorrow we leave for Clatterbridge again, this time with Barbara and Skipper. We will all stay in the caravan at Meols on the Wirral. Meols is a small sleepy sort of town, right on the northern end of the Wirral Peninsula. To the south is the river Dee, and to the north is the river Mersey. The campsite is quiet with most of the residents being permanent. The towns of Hoylake and West Kirby are just a couple of miles away and Clatterbridge Hospital is just 7.2 miles away.

I spent most of last week cruising on the Mersey Ferry, or riding round the streets. I also cruised the dock system of Liverpool on the Yellow Duck Marine, or Lamb Banana Marine, as they like to call it now. This is a sort of amphibious bus that was built to assist with the D-day landings and now three of them, and soon to be four, carry tourists every half hour through the streets and docks of Liverpool with full live commentary.

Over the last week I have listened to many commentaries regarding Liverpool, both on the ferry cruises and the yellow duck. I can tell you now that I have learned that just about everything in Liverpool is, the biggest, the oldest, the newest, the only one of its kind, the longest, and so on. Well, I don't know who is behind the marketing of tourism in Liverpool, but it is certainly working. The place is thriving, and it's not only heaving with tourists. Buildings are going up left right and centre. Huge investment is taking place. Liverpool, once again is buzzing, and one gets the feeling that that 60's 'feel good factor' is returning again.

Next week I intend to spend more time on the Wirral side and in Chester. Of course I will let you know how I get on down

there. Andy, my radiologist is from Sidney and he had never heard of the Isle of Man. I am taking him some odds and sods back with me so I am off to try and get hold of a bottle of Manx Spirit now. I am hoping that the wind will die down so that we can get away tomorrow on time. Well of course we will probably get away on time, but Heaven knows what time we will arrive. I will be blogging away next Saturday, Steam Packet and weather willing. In the meantime, take good care people. Keep your spirits up, and enjoy life.

June 25, 2008

I hope this latest blog entry is readable. It is being tapped out by Barbara on an XDA Palm.

What a week we've had so far! We arrived at the hospital on Monday more or less straight from the boat. Tom waited for an hour or so whilst I walked around the wooded perimeter with Skipper. Tom was informed that the machine that does the radiotherapy had broken down and he was asked to return at 6 pm. We went back at 6 and the backlog meant he wasn't seen until 7:30. Tom has to psyche himself up for this treatment due to the mask he has to wear, so Monday wasn't one of his better days.

Tuesday we had to call the hospital to check if the machine was working. It had broken down again and once more we were asked to go in at 6 pm instead. We went to see my mother in St .Helens for the afternoon and then on to Clatterbridge. At least he had his treatment fairly quickly that night and didn't have to wait. We got back to the caravan just in time for him to listen to the Archers, a favourite of Tom's.

Wednesday another phone call to the hospital revealed that the machine was finally fixed and Tom's appointment at 12:15 was going ahead on time. Off we went to the hospital, checked in and sat waiting. We weren't too concerned when the fire alarm went off, as the building wasn't evacuated. We sat for quite some time & I watched the male radiographer who normally delivered the treatment, walk past with a bottle of pop & a bag of crisps, obviously going for his lunch. An hour past and I had to go walk Skipper in the by now, well trodden, very familiar wooded area. When I returned Tom just about finished his treatment. Knowing how hard he finds it and how he has to psyche himself, I was glad it was over until the next day. It also meant that we were over halfway through the dreaded facemask treatment. Radiotherapy to the head is only for 2 weeks. The chest is for 3 weeks. On our way out of the hospital Tom said, "You won't believe why it was delayed today. The person before me trashed the equipment." At least he knew that everyone sitting in at waiting room for similar treatment was also going through the same emotions as he.

Apart from the treatment, we have been enjoying leisurely walks along the Wirral coast. Skipper loves the change of scenery and on the whole, is well behaved.

Yesterday my sister Janet came to stay the night with us. Whilst Tom watched the football, we went to see the sunset and take Skipper for his last walk of the day. We were chuffed to see a rare bird visitor to Britain, a little egret. It won't mean much to most people, but it was cause for excitement with Janet and I.

Today the treatment should be at the usual time, if that happens, Tom will come back to the caravan to rest and look after Skipper, whilst I go to Cheshire Oaks with Janet. I've never been and have heard its good, so I've just got to see. My other sister, Jacqueline is coming to see us tonight, and tomorrow it is home for the weekend. Tom has managed to get an 8.30 appointment so we can get an earlier boat home. It will be great to be home again. Our friend, Karron who has been looking after my menagerie will probably welcome a night from parrot sitting.

One other bit of news this week is that Tom was informed that they had actually now found dead centre of the main cancer in his lung and the battle continues
in earnest.

June 28, 2008

How wonderful it is to be back again albeit just for another flying weekend trip. Well I guess I better begin my report by getting the Steam Packet out of the way first.

I crossed over last Monday morning on the *Super Seacat*, now named the '*Viking*'. I think I said last week that these fast craft vessels should not be given names. They haven' earned them and don't deserve them. They are merely water busses. They come out of the factory as numbers and that is all they should be identified by. So, I caught the number 24 to Liverpool last Monday morning. I spoke last week of the awful food that is dished out onboard the *Super Seacat*. I can tell you it had not improved. 'Well why did you have a second go at it?' I hear you ask.

I once knew a publican by the name of Herbie Nelson who had the Whitstone Pub in Ballasalla. His beer was absolutely awful. Herbie was proud of the fact that he had a reputation for serving up the worst beer on the Island. When he was asked the question, "When Herbie, are you going to do something about your awful beer!" "Never," replied Herbbie. "People come from all over the Island because they can't believe how bad my beer is," said Herbie. "There are even day trips from Fleetwood because folks over there can't believe it either. If I was to do anything about it, there would be nobody in here!"

I think the Steam Packet have adopted this policy regarding the food on their Super Seacat. Barbara could not believe how bad it was, so insisted on trying it. I went along with her and ordered a full breakfast bap. I have sent off the so-called fresh Ramsey bakery bap to be valued by an antiques dealer on the Merseyside. I didn't recognize the taste of my egg, but then maybe I should have asked for a chicken's egg. I won't even comment on the state of the sausages. Anyway I contrast that with the very reasonably priced lunch of sausage, egg, beans and chips I very much enjoyed on the *Ben My Chree* yesterday. In fact crossing over on the Ben yesterday made me think it difficult to believe I am sailing with the same company I sailed out with the previous Monday. My message to the Packet is, "Get rid of your water busses and buy another *Ben My Chree* and I promise I will not write another poem." Is it too late to cancel the slightly newer water bus? Probably!

Well now folks, down to business. I have just returned from my morning jaunt around Poulson Park with Skipper. Over on the Wirral I really missed not being able to just get up and go for a walk. Shortly I will head out to the flying club for breakfast, something else I have really missed. None–the-less, I have had a really good time on the Wirral this last week. There are miles and miles of empty beaches. On Wednesday we walked from Meols, along the coast to Leasowe Lighthouse and back, a round trip of around 2-3 miles. We hardly met a soul and Skipper loved it. The rapid tidal flow of the Mersey meant that without any local knowledge, we only walked on the beach during falling tides. We walked the

Wirral shoreline each morning and evening. I think Skipper would very much recommend a holiday in Meols or on the Wirral to all dogs. In fact he is thinking of starting his own dog blog when my treatment is over.

The treatment has gone well this week, although my appointments were all up the swanny. The machines kept breaking down and my 12:15 appointments were often put back until 6 or 7 in the evening. I was not kept hanging about the hospital though, it simply meant that I had to phone in every day to check if the machines were working. On Thursday, a patient who was being treated just before me decided he had had enough and trashed the equipment. I don't think he did that much damage though as it only meant a delay of an hour or so. The treatment to the head is not a pleasant experience. It involves lying on a steel bed. A helmet/mask is then placed over your face and then pulled tightly behind your head by four straps. These straps are then secured to the steel bed. Your head is now tied very tightly to the bed. You can't move any part of your face, and breathing of course is possible, but difficult. Once the helmet/mask is secure, and all the machines are in place, the nursing staff leaves the room and controls everything remotely. You can hear the machines maneuvering around your bed. The bed starts to lift up and swings from side to side. When everything is lined up, you hear the machine delivering the radiation to your head. A horrible gassy smell fills your nose. The mask is clamped firmly around your face and head so you can't instinctively turn your nose away from it. This procedure lasts for about 12 minutes. The only way to deal with it is to think of other things. Well in my case to get through the ordeal, I told myself, for every session of this treatment, I might be buying a couple of years of life. So I just put up with these 12 minutes after all, its only four boiled eggs. All I can say to you people is this; if you don't want to have to experience this treatment, if you smoke, pack it in, otherwise you will probably one day just have to put up with the treatment like me.

I have to say though, that Clatterbridge hospital is absolutely fantastic. I don't know where they train their staff or what kind of selection policy they have when recruiting staff, but whatever they do, it should be copied by every other hospital. The trouble with that would be that nobody would want to come out of hospital.

It is now time for me to go and have my breakfast out at the Flying Club. If time allows I will be here blogging tomorrow. I have missed you all very much, and I really look forward to being back home again a week on Wednesday when my treatment ends. I will be back on the Island next weekend.

June 29, 2008

It is Sunday morning and all is well. Tomorrow morning I and my good friends Ray and Pauline Cregeen will take the 7:30 water bus to Liverpool. Yes the gathering is on the move and will reconvene on the Wirral for a week. Barbara will join us Tuesday evening after catching up with a few things and Karron will again take over the menagerie management.

This weekend I have received many calls from folks who have had treatment at Clatterbridge. I am indeed inspired by their calls. Many of them can only follow the blog by reading Manx Tails. Of course Manx Tails only comes out once a month and only carries one blog. I am trying to think of a method whereby we can bring the blog to those who don't have access to a computer. So far though, I am drawing blanks.

I have just received a phone call from my old friend, Captain Jack Ronan. Captain Jack was often the Captain on the IOM Steam Packet vessels when I was traveling backwards and forwards to School in the 60's. It is strange that I should find myself talking to him today, the day before I am heading back to Liverpool once again.

In a previous blog I told you about the time Captain Jack took me back to the convent school, and on seeing I was not a happy lad regarding returning to school, he parted with the words. "This will all pass by lad; soon it will be just a little bit of history in your life." Well, I have found myself remembering those words this last couple of weeks at Clatterbridge. It appears that whenever I have faced adversity in my life, Captain Jack appears somewhere and has some inspirational words.

This morning I have been out and bought some boxes of Manx fudge and Manx toffee for the nurses. I didn't know you could buy Manx Toffee. It's probably made in China, but at least there is a picture of the IOM on the box. Last week, I took them some bottles of Manx Spirit. Let's hope they don't tuck in to it before they begin my treatment.

I have just this minute put the telephone down again after speaking to John Rudd. John called me to tell me he received treatment in Clatterbridge 18 years ago for throat cancer. John also follows my progress through Manx Tails. It seems the Island is full of living proof of the success of Clatterbridge.

Well it is now time for me to bid you farewell once again. Weather and Steam Packet willing, I will be back on the old blog this time next week. I can't thank you all enough for your support and I love you all to bits. You may hear from Barbara during the week as she has one of those fancy, all singing and dancing phones than enable you to do anything.

July 6, 2008

I'm back on yet another flying visit. I will return to the Wirral tomorrow morning, however, this time only for a couple of days. If all goes well I will return to the Island on Tuesday night with treatment complete.

I it has been another fascinating week on the Wirral. On this last trip I was accompanied by Ray and Pauline Cregeen from Port St.Mary. Barbara joined us on the Tuesday along with Skipper. Skipper did not collect an ASBO on the Wirral and I am at a loss to understand why his behaviour was so much better over there than it is here.

The seashore is only about 50 yards from our caravan and it is mainly unpopulated. Skipper had miles and miles of mostly empty shoreline to frolic about on. The Mersey tides are not to be messed with though. The speed of the tide in the Mersey reaches about 6 knots or 7 miles per hour. When the tide is at full flow, the Mersey rises by 9 feet in just one hour.

Well of course I cannot complete this blog without having my weekly pop at the S*uper Seacat*, now renamed by one of our American readers as the '*Sea Slug'*. Thank you Cheryl, in Washington State, you have it about right. Having boarded at about 7am last Monday, we left on time at 7.30. The armrest on my seat was broken in two, and when I pulled down the flip table from the back of the seat in front of me, it still had the remains of a meal from a previous trip. I then pulled out the newspaper from the seat pocket and handed it to Ray saying, "Well at least you don't need to buy a newspaper". He took the paper and replied, "Well if you missed the news on April 12th I shall read it to you." If the maintenance down below is anything like the general upkeep up on top, it is little wonder she keeps conking out. I will return to the *Sea Slug* later in a slightly more positive vane regarding our trip home.

Monday and Tuesday of last week saw the last of my radiation treatment to my head. I was not sorry to see the end of that awful mask on Tuesday. I have not been as lucky with the radiation treatment regarding side effects as I was with chemotherapy. The side effects of radiotherapy have left me pretty much wiped out. My skin dried up and peeled away from my forehead, ears, face and back. The worst part has been my eyes. The skin peeled away on my eyelashes and because I have glass eyes, the glass eyes rubbing on the dried up eyelashes was, and still is, extremely painful.

Anyway enough of that, I have been looked after by the most fantastic people on the planet. My radiographer's are Sima from Iran, she is simply the most wonderful kind and caring lady you are ever likely to meet. Andy is from Sidney, he always seems to have that little bit of extra time to talk and reassure me of what is happening. Cathy, from Telford but now dwells in Liverpool is another star of this fantastic team. It is a shame you have to have cancer to experience the great care of these people. I am sure there is no place on Earth as caring and reassuring as Clatterbridge hospital.

On Tuesday I will return home for good, and with a lot less baggage than I went out with, as hopefully my lung cancer will be in the Clatterbridge bin. We have now given up the caravan and on Monday night we will stay in a hotel in St. Helens. I will not be sorry to see the back of the caravan.

As caravans go, there is nothing wrong with it, and it meant that we could have Skipper out there with us. None-the-less, three weeks in a caravan is quite long enough for me. The rain on the Wirral this last two weeks has been horrendous. The noise on the roof meant you could not hear either TV or radio. The grass that the caravan sits on has been a lake. The site itself though is fine. It is a little community within itself. Everyone helps each other out.

Those of you have been following the blog from way back will recall a story I told about a trip I made to Manchester back in 1981. I told of how I entered a pub called the Nellie. A bit of a scrap broke out and some guy turned a fire hose on all the customers in the pub, including yours truly. We all left the pub soaked to the skin including the pub landlady. You can imagine how gob smacked I was when I related this story to the lady in the caravan next to mine. She listened to my story then, once she had recovered her composure she gasped, "My name is Margaret, and I was the landlady of the Nellie on that night." Talk about it being a small World! Margaret now runs the pub on the caravan site.

Another wonderful surprise this week was to meet up with my old friend, Little Robbie. I last saw Robbie back on 1974 when he was sacked from Davis Charlton for letting other workers know about his secret pay rise. I, along with just about everybody else was sacked a couple of years later. Robbie now lives in North Wales and he drove all the way out to spend a couple of hours with us. It was fantastic to meet up with him once again, and hopefully I will pop over to see him once this little project in life is complete.

On Tuesday, I met up with another blog reader from Chester. I have written about Anna, our doctor in Chester. On Tuesday myself, Ray and Pauline met up with Anna and took a river cruise along the Dee on the 'Jackie'. It was a wonderful day. We sailed up through the Duke of Westminster's estate. As I listened to the commentary regarding what this man owns, which indeed was a very lengthy list. I don't know why they don't simply just say, "The Duke of Westminster's estate is basically Chester, and the Dee River." In fact, why not just list the few bits of land he doesn't own? Well anyway, Anna brought a fab lunch along with her and later we enjoyed some splendid hospitality back at her house.

On Tuesday night Barbara and Skipper joined us. Wednesday, my nephew Matthew and his girlfriend Louise called to see us and on Thursday, Barbara and Pauline, along with Barbara's mother Jean, sister Janet, niece Beth with boyfriend Lee and Aunty May, all trooped off to the Cheshire Oaks shopping centre. Later on Thursday, my other niece Fiona along with Barbara's sister Jacqueline and brother in law Lawrence called to see us.

Barbara, Skipper and Pauline returned home on Friday morning. Ray and I caught the Friday evening sailing, as my treatment on Friday was too late for me to catch the morning sailing.

We spent a couple of hours trawling around the Albert dock. The sailing to Douglas was delayed yet again and didn't get away until after 8 p.m. We began by sitting in the main seating area. However, once 100 or more school kids boarded, just before the vessel left, we decided to upgrade. Upstairs on the *Sea Slug* is a very different experience than is in steerage. A steward who served us freshly made sandwiches and coffee in china cups waited us on. Newspapers were also included as part of the deal, and even a little bowl of sweets is served along with your bill. £13.50 to upgrade does sound a tad expensive. However, when you think they charge around £4.50 for most sandwiches down below and £1.55 for a cup of coffee, I think overall, it is worth it and I will try to upgrade tomorrow morning. That just about completes my week. From Wednesday, I will be back blogging every day once again, although I'm sure you have been glad of the break, but all good things come to an end.

I will be writing articles from now on for Manx Tails, which will not have been included in the blog. For those of you off Island readers, I will attach the Manx Tails articles to the blog at the end of the month when Tails comes out.

I said how fantastic the staff at Clatterbridge are, well it is also true of my blog readers. Your support and encouragement has been absolutely fantastic as well. I am extremely grateful to you all. I look forward to getting back to normal next week. I'm not sure if life can ever be quite the same again but maybe it's not supposed to be. Each day reveals a new story and we just don't know what the end will entail.

July 9. 2008

It is truly magnificent to be home once again and hopefully this time for good. Over the last 4 weeks I have been on one of the most fascinating adventures of my life. I have met some of the most fantastic people on the planet. I have experienced highs and lows. I feel as though I have been put through the washing machine, tumbled dried, ironed, and now returned feeling a little scarred and battered, but cleansed of cancer, for now at least.

The situation seems to be that the radiation treatment has sent the cancer packing. Now I have to play the waiting game. Should the cancer return in three months it will be possible to receive treatment, but difficult. If I can go six months so much the better, if I can get 12 months under my belt, then I can be treated again just as I have been right now. There is a chance that the cancer might not return at all. On the other hand it might return next week. I still have the side effects from the radiation to contend with. I have to keep applying moisturizing cream to my forehead, eyes, face, back and ears. It is like being badly sunburned. It is also painful to swallow. However, these side effects are indeed a small price to pay for my treatment.

Caltterbridge has to be the most wonderful hospital on the planet, and by that I mean the people that work there and not the bricks and mortar. It is a shame you have to endure cancer to get there. Before leaving for Clatterbridge 4 weeks ago, I had never heard of the RVWS, The Royal Voluntary Women's Service. They do an unbelievable job in Clatterbridge. They run the cafes on a no profit basis. You can have a breakfast for less than £2. They come around the hospital with free drinks, coffee, tea and so on. They go on errands fetching medicines and drugs from the hospital chemist for patients. They also act as guides around this huge hospital. Clatterbridge hospital would knock spots of the hotel I stayed in Monday night in St. Helens. We will return to Clatterbridge in later blogs and in Manx Tails next month.
Now folks, you will have gathered that over the last month or so, myself and the Steam Packet's *Super Seacat*, or *Sea Slug* have not been getting along too well. I have to report to you that the tension between us has eased a little after this last trip. I guess we have developed a sort of love-hate relationship. I do the hating, and she does the loving. Her gearbox has now been repaired, so she is now back to her two and a half hour crossing time between here and Liverpool. Just after leaving port, an announcement informs you that the Steam Packet is committed to protecting the environment, so don't throw your rubbish over the side. Well the punters are obeying that and leaving their rubbish onboard the ship, she is a floating wheelie bin! None-the-less, going out to Liverpool last Monday, because I had such a good experience when I upgraded the previous Friday, I did so again. I thought on my homeward journey on Friday that £13.50 wasn't bad as it appeared to include sandwiches as well. Not this time though. The £13.50 gave me a quieter lounge, a free cup of coffee, a newspaper, and 4 boiled sweets, which arrived with my bill. However, this time I choose the continental breakfast. At £4.50 I found it very good value when compared with the full breakfast on the so-called fresh Ramsey bakery bap. I very much enjoyed a fresh croissant with cheese and tomato, a yogurt, banana, and a fruit juice. I have no complaints at £4.50, indeed it is good value. However, £13.50 for a coffee, a newspaper and some biscuits in a slightly quieter lounge just seems to me to be a little excessive. Anyway that's enough Steam Packet bashing from me, when I compare Steam Packet prices against the hotel prices I stayed in last night, the Packet emerged as a saintly company.

I stayed in a 3 star hotel in St Helens. It was £90 for a room. Fine, I thought. The room was stiflingly hot and the noise of the air conditioning was driving me round the twist. I rang down to reception to ask how do I go about opening the windows. "You can't," she informed me. "If you are too hot, then turn on the fan," was her response. We managed to turn off the air conditioning but of course the noise of the fan now replaced the noise of the air conditioning. Even with the fan turned on the room remained stifling. We could not locate a kettle to make a drink, so once again I called reception to ask for two cups of coffee to be brought up. The coffees turned up at a cost of £5 for room service and £2.75 each cup. They did not tell us either that the kettle, coffee, milk and teabags were all stashed away in a cupboard. Well I have very little experience of staying in hotels so maybe this is normal practice. If it is, I shall be bringing my tent with me in the future. I like a can of John Smith’s at nighttime, as you will all know. So, on locating the fridge, which was turned off, I called Reception once again to enquire how to turn it on. "You have to pay for the fridge to be turned on," was the reply. Yes, not only did you have to pay to have the fridge turned on, but also part with around £30 to stock it with all kinds of drinks I didn't want. Frustrated, fed up and ripped off, Barbara and I wended our way down stairs to join Barbara's mother for dinner. We ordered a steak, which was supposedly going to be served on a bed of vegetables. The steaks turned up at £19 each and just sitting on top of a spoonful of mashed potatoes. When we enquired about vegetables we were told we could order a bowl of chunky chips at £1.95 and so it went on for each portion of veg. A continental breakfast in this place was £12 and full English was £16. On checking out, they tried to over charge us by £30. Needless to say, they failed. We left and won't be back. After my one overnight stay in this hotel from Hell, my trip home on the *Sea Slug* last night seemed like I was sailing on a floating Christmas Grotto.

I have many more stories to tell after spending four weeks on the Wirral. I will include them as we go along. The people of the Wirral and the Merseysiders are absolutely the salt of the Earth. I met nothing but kindness and goodwill from both sides of the water. I am delighted to be back and writing the blog on a regular basis once again. It is now time to sign off for today though. I am just so happy today to have traded the busy, noisy banks of the Mersey, for the lush sweet meadows on the banks of the Silverburn.

July 10, 2008

Today we drove up to Ronaldsway Halt and walked south along the Silverburn to the waterfall, then turned and headed back north to the halt again; a tiny railway station and a tiny river.

This time last week I was walking on the banks of the Mersey and the nearest railway station was Lime Street. What a contrast! Lime Street with its busy taxi rank, buses and people wheeling trolleys; the noise of the traffic and the general hubbub of a city centre; the Mersey with its salty air and industrial smell, although not as bad as it use to be; ships out on the river coming and going, ferry boats crisscrossing the river. There was plenty of interest for us humans, but not much going for you if you're a dog.

At Ronaldsway the two seater bench was empty. The first train will only arrive about 10:30. I met absolutely no one on my mile walk or so, wonderful for both man and dog.

Yet there are many thousands of folk in Liverpool who would not swap places with me. They love their city life; they make the city what it is. Liverpool is changing. Huge buildings are going up left, right and centre around the Pier Head area. The waterfront is totally changing. The new Liverpool One Shopping Centre is starting to take shape. I am told it is going to be the biggest shopping centre in Europe when it is completed. Well what a surprise, isn't everything in Liverpool now destined to be the biggest, smallest, newest, oldest or whatever?

I walked around Liverpool One for three hours on Tuesday afternoon. During my time over the last 4 weeks spent on the Wirral and Liverpool, I have learned to take what I hear on the news at face value.

We all know what the media image of Scousers is. Well I have to speak as I have found. On Tuesday afternoon as I trawled around Liverpool One, dragging our shopping trolley behind me, every time we came to a stair case a Scouser seemed to spring from a hidden cavity in the wall and offer to carry my bag down the stairs. Doors were opened as we approached them. We finally ended up in Debenham’s and sat down to eat in their restaurant. It was 4:40 and the lady explained that they stop selling hot food at 4pm. None-the-less she still went ahead and broke company rules to provide me with fish and chips, and a bowl of chips and sandwiches for Barbara and her mother. While I was sitting at the table waiting for the meal, which was wonderful, I broke in to a little fit of coughing. A lady immediately sprang from behind the counter and arrived at my table with a glass of iced water. The strange thing is, I hate shopping with a passion. However, my experience of going to Liverpool One on Tuesday was a bit like going to the dentist and discovering on your arrival that it has been turned into an ice-cream parlour.

Before my shopping trip I had completed my umpteenth tour of the Albert. The landscape on the waterfront of Liverpool is changing fast, and new buildings are springing up deep in to the city centre. However, it is the people of Liverpool that made Liverpool a great city in the past, and so it shall be for the future. Like any city they have their problems and there are parts of Liverpool where only fools would venture. But the city of Liverpool is very much on the up again and the people that are making that happen are as good a folk as you will meet anywhere on this planet.
Meanwhile just a mile across the river lays the Wirral peninsula where I spent most of my time. Our caravan was only about 50 yeads from the Meols shoreline. This shore is a fairly isolated part of the Wirral. Few people appear to use the beach, just the odd dog walker could be found on the wonderful Meols Common which was full of allsorts of wonderful wild flowers and birds. On most days I would walk along the bridal path to Leasowe Lighthouse and back, a round trip of about 4 miles. Although I tried to obtain some local knowledge of the area, it was not forth coming. No one I spoke with seemed to know much or care for that matter. My next-door neighbour on the camp site wasn't even sure if it was the Mersey, the Irish Sea or the River Dee that washed his shoreline, yet he had a dog and walked it every day. Margaret the pub landlady who lived in the caravan just across from me wasn't even sure which county she was in. Margaret is a larger than life character. She is one of those ladies you would not want to fall out with, and would be damn glad to have her on your side in a battle. Her pub on the site is called the Lighthouse and became a cafe in the morning and she served breakfast between 10 a.m. and 12 p.m., however only on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. When I asked her why she didn't serve breakfast on Tuesday sand Thursdays, her reply was. "Because no bugger turns up Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, so why the in hell should I bother on Tuesday and Thursdays".

I could never imagine that I could ever go for a walk on our beach here and not know the state of the tide and the direction of the wind. I doubt also that there would be anyone around here who would not know that the UK is to the East of us and Ireland is to the West of us. Imagine my shock horror then as I sat on Liverpool's waterfront one day when some guy and his lady friend appeared from nowhere and sat beside me. The chap explained to his lady friend that they had now arrived at the Atlantic Ocean. I pulled my hanky from my pocket to hide my laughter and I hoped he did not notice. A little later he it would appear, he realized his mistake and explained that this wasn't the Atlantic but the Irish Sea and that is Ireland straight ahead of us. I did not like to interfere by explaining that this was actually the River Mersey, and the land they saw on the other side of the river, just one mile across was the town of Birkenhead on the Wirral Peninsula.

July 11, 2008

I woke up this morning not feeling too bright. I felt tired and swallowing breakfast was hard work. I seem to have woken this morning with many of the side effects of the radiation treatment all arriving at the same time, just like London Buses. I wish the side effects would mirror IOM busses and then I would probably have none. Anyway I simply told myself, "Glassey, firstly you should be grateful that you have woken up at all, and secondly you are waking up to many brighter prospects than you were facing just three months ago". A few pills and a drop of medicine, the name of which I can't pronounce, will soon sort me out.

I am just back from walking Skipper. Again we headed for Ronaldsway Halt and did a little tour along the Silverburn River. I apologize to the lady who was heading through the halt as I was coming out. Well I apologize on Skipper's behalf. Skipper doesn't do apologies, nor does he sit and wait patiently at gates for his mum and dad to catch up with him. He bounded off with your dog because he wanted to show your dog where the best and stinkiest cow muck is. He also has a secret mud pool that remains wet and stinky even after prolonged sunny spells.

Last Friday I sat on the waterfront in Liverpool. A large cruise liner was about to berth. She was the *Grand Princess* of 1008 tons. She is 290 metres in length and was carrying 1500 passengers. It was almost as if yet another large building had turned up in Liverpool, albeit a floating one.

I was thinking this morning as I wandered along the Silverburn that probably the largest vessel to sail on this river would be one of Jed Clayton's plastic frolic frogs. Harold Wilson once said that a week is a long time in politics. Well in one week, I have gone from the *Grand Princess* to Kermit the frog, so who needs politics in order to have a long week?

As I sat there on the banks of the Mersey someone read a sign out. It said, 'This water is deep and fast flowing, danger'. Well I ask you, there is a ruddy great liner 290 metres long berthed on the landing stage and we have a sign telling us that the water is deep! As far as I know there are no notices on the Silverburn explaining that the water is shallow and slow running so don't dive in! Another notice I stumbled on yesterday was over in Port Erin. I went there for a plate of their fantastic fish and chips at lunchtime. A notice has appeared stating that, should you drink alcohol once a police officer has told you not to, you maybe fined. Blimey just exactly what kind of laws are we passing these days. What is coming next? If you shoot someone after a police officer has told you not to you might go to prison!

Well folks I am going to retire now from writing for today. It is fantastic to be back on the old blogger once again though. I have included my July Manx Tails article at the end of today’s entry. This is for our off Island readers. Blog readers might find the Manx Tails articles a bit repetitive. However, we have to bear in mind that many folks don't have access to computers and don't read the blog. This means I have to try and cram in to about 1000 words the same amount of info as we do on the blog every day.

Well people, I am going to go and have a lie down now and listen to a bit of 5 Live on the wireless. There won't be a gathering tonight as I am not quite up for it, but I'm sure the boys will refuel elsewhere and we will gather again maybe on Saturday.

July Issue ManxTails

I have two hats that hang beside each other on hooks in my front porch. The first hat is a Tilley hat my wife Barbara bought me from Tynwald Mills last autumn. The Tilley hat is a sort of waterproof sun hat, made in Canada and ideal for spring and autumn. At the time I was just starting to feel ill, but I was looking forward to wearing the hat this spring. Not long after, I was diagnosed with lung cancer and I remember thinking, I may never get to wear the Tilley hat. At about that time, my friend David Handscombe, who lives across the road, was away in Canada on holiday. On his return he wandered over to see me, unaware that whilst he was away, I had been diagnosed with cancer. He brought me back a present, a Canadian River hat, complete with earflaps. It was an ideal hat for winter. I almost wept as I hung the Rver hat along side the Tilley hat. At that time, I was so ill I could hardly walk the length of the garden, let alone go out for a walk with the dog. I had been told that there was probably not very much that could be done for me, and I didn't expect to see the winter out. It was another hat I thought I would never live long enough to wear. Three months down the line, and after a course of chemotherapy, I am happy to report that I wore the Rver hat every day on my walks during the last days of winter and now I wear the Tilley hat every day as I step it out with my wife Barbara and Skipper, my pet Border

Cllie, each day. By the time you are reading this article I will be just about coming to the end of my radiation course in Clatterbridge. I am now hopeful of making a full recovery, which is something I did not think was remotely possible just a couple short months ago.

I am not a gambler, however, life does seem a bit like a horse race to me. In horse racing the fastest horses are handicapped, in as much as they are given extra weight to carry, to try and make the race fair. Life is a bit like that. Many of us are handicapped in many different ways. In horse racing the handicapper decides which horses should carry the most weight. In real life it's someone else. I'm not sure whom though. However, some folk refer to that person as being God. They may well be right, but for me, he or she is simply The Boss. Our objective is simply to arrive at the finishing line and not necessarily to win the race. There are hurdles along the way. We have cleared chemotherapy and now we must clear the next fence, radiotherapy. Hopefully I will have many more fences to jump before I reach the finishing line. When I do eventually reach the finishing line, just as in horse racing, only then will I know if the handicapper got it right.

In the meantime, my two hats, the Tilley hat and the Canadian Rver hat hang side by side in my front porch. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that two hats would bring me so much sadness and tears, and now so much joy and happiness.

Now, each day according to the weather,I go to the hook and select the most appropriate hat for the weather conditions. I am now just so grateful to be in a position to choose which hat I am going to wear. A couple of months ago, I had no need for any hat or coat. The only clothing that was relevant to me was the duvet on my bed.

An old farmer was once asked why he had never married. His reply was. "I would rather go through life wanting something I didn't have, than having something I didn't want." Well, today I have cancer and of course I don't want it. However, I have many more things I still want and always will want. My wife, Barbara, my dog, Skipper. I am lucky enough to be living on the most wonderful place on the planet. I am getting stronger and better each day. Life could be a whole lot worse. I do not intend to waste my time trying to work out the meaning of life. Mother Teresa did that much better than I can, with these words.

Life is an opportunity, benefit from it.
Life is beauty, admire it.
Life is a dream, realize it.
Life is a challenge, meet it.
Life is a duty, complete it.
Life is a game, play it.
Life is a promise, fulfill it.
Life is sorrow, overcome it.
Life is a song, sing it.
Life is a struggle, accept it.
Life is a tragedy, confront it.
Life is an adventure, dare it.
Life is luck, make it.
Life is too precious, do not destroy it.
Life is life, fight for it.

July 12, 2008

Saturday has come round once again. I’m just back from Ronaldsway Halt. We have a steady northwesterly blowing, but the sun is shining. I have woken up feeling good, and I hope that you have too. Of course lots of things can happen today to change how we feel about it. So far so good I suppose. You maybe a lucky lottery winner by 8 o’clock tonight, on the other hand, you might be lying in Nobles hospital having been run down by the Douglas to Port St Mary bus. So, if you have woken up feeling good, make the best of it while it lasts.

Now then, yesterday I was talking about silly notices that seem to have sprung up around the place such as. “This road is impassable when flooded.” A notice did appear in Castletown but only for a short time. It was placed on a board outside the chemist on Malew Street, and read, “Keep Castletown tidy, dump your rubbish in Malew!” Last night on the 5 o’clock news on Manx Radio, the newsreader read out that a guy had been convicted of breaking into part of a building. Surely you would need a JCB to break into an entire building! Can you now break into a bank but plead not guilty as you only broke into the safe?

Well now folks, here is a little story for you. When I left Clatterbridge hospital on Tuesday they gave me some moisturizing cream. This is to assist with the sun burning effect that radiation leaves you with. They told me to apply it several times a day. It comes in a large tube. It was getting low so when Barbara came home from shopping on Thursday I found a tube in amongst the shopping and presumed she had been to the chemist and replenished my stocks. Before we went walking with Skipper yesterday morning I applied my cream from the newly obtained tube. It did not rub in like my stuff from Clatterbridge does and it left a thick sticky film around my forehead and face. Skipper kept jumping up and licking me and Skipper is not a licker. I mentioned to Barbara that the cream she bought was not as good as the original and left a sticky film. She was a bit bemused and said she hadn’t bought any cream and perhaps with the cold weather, it wasn’t being absorbed into my skin the same. When Ann Byrne, my nurse, called at lunchtime to check up on me she asked to see the cream I had been applying. The tube of cream I had removed from Barbara’s shopping bag was in fact a tube of Primula cheese and ham spread. Barbara had bought it because I have difficulty in eating and thought it would go down OK on fresh soft bread. Well at least it was applied in a medical sense.

July 14, 2008

I want to begin this morning by saying a big hello and a very warm welcome to Marla in Los Angeles. Marla has contacted me through Stan and Mo Bradbury from Castletown. Marla is a regular reader of the blog and when she read my account of the *Grand Princess* berthing at the cruise terminal in Liverpool last week she got in touch to let us know that onboard the *Grand Princess* were her parents, an aunt and several cousins. So, it is not just the blog that circumnavigates the globe, real people also come in the opposite direction.

Well talking of the cruise liner *Grand Princess* reminds me of seasickness. Fortunately I have never suffered from seasickness, however, it has come to my notice that some people appear to suffer from seasickness traveling under the water just as much as others do from traveling over it. As I wended my way through the Mersey tunnel last Monday

someone had puked up in the pay box on the Wallasey side of the tunnel. I would not like to be the poor devil that had to count that up at the end of the day.

Well I have had a nice weekend just chilling out. I am managing to get out with Skipper but unfortunately I haven't managed the boat yet. I hope to be fishing again by the end of this week. At present climbing onboard and getting ashore again would just be a tad too much. Every day I am stronger though, so it won't be long now before we are back on the high seas again.
Unfortunately my fish and chips and all that have gone for a Burton. Bacon and sausage has been replaced with croissants and yogurt. The strange thing is I am becoming quite fond of croissants and yogurt. We shall see how things are going in a month or so. Somehow I have a feeling that I will be out there at the Flying Club tucking into a full breakfast once again and I don't think the chippies have seen the last of me just yet.

Well folks that is about it for this morning. Barbara has to take my Mother to Nobles and we want to get the blog on the site before she goes, so that means me signing off now. I will be back tomorrow though and I hope you will too.

July 15, 2008

It is just a tad on the wild side today, a stiff wind is blowing from the northwest and high tide tonight at about 10:30 which means no fishing for me tonight. Well I am not really sure if I am up to fishing just yet. I think I just might struggle a little getting on and off the boat. However, another 24 hours and I will be even better than I am now. It is now 8 a.m. and as of yet, I have neither breakfasted nor taken Skipper for his morning bounce along the Silverburn. I will probably do both in the middle writing this.

Thank you to Mairead who replied to my request for silly notices and news items that seem to be cropping up lately. Mairaid emailed to tell me that on Manx Radio's news on Monday they reported that thieves had broken into the bike and toy shed at St. Thomas's school and disturbed the bikes and toys. I turned my radio on at 1 p.m. yesterday and yes, that is exactly what they said. How dare a bunch of thieves break into the bike shed and disturb the bikes and toys from their afternoon nap! Also Pam Allan emailed me from Middlesburough to say she spotted a notice, which says "Thank you for noticing this new notice."

This morning I am going to have to hang around for the postman. I am expecting a small parcel from the US. They called with it yesterday, but for whatever reason they thought I wasn't in. I was but I didn't hear any bell ring or door knock. Anyway we shall try again today.

I wonder just how many people are going to be effected by what the postman brings today. Some I guess will discover they have a new job with much brighter prospects. Someone will be depressed because they have been turned down for a new job. Some will receive wealth and others just bloody bills. Whatever, many people's lives will drastically change as a result of what the postman brings today. The postman probably changes or has a more profound effect on people's lives than anyone else.

I spent a brief period myself as a postman. It was during my time at the Royal Bank of Scotland. When they moved the bank's switchboard to Jersey, I found myself with nothing to do. The bank didn't seem to want to make me redundant so I was left to sort out myself. I invented the job of postman. It simply meant that 5 times a day I went up to the post room and gathered up the post and delivered it around the bank. I even went down to the post office and got myself a postbag so that I looked the real deal. One Christmas a mate of mine called in to the bank to see if I wanted a lift home. "Yes" I said "but I'll just finish my round". I finished my round and couldn't be bothered putting my bag away on the top floor of the bank, so I just left the bank with the bag around my neck. On the way out someone gave me a bottle of whisky, which I just shoved, in the top of the bag with the neck of the bottle sticking out. My mate David had to collect something from a shop on Strand Street, so I waited outside the shop for him with the postbag around my neck and the bottle whisky sticking out of the top. I also had a white stick. Of course Strand Street was busy as it was Christmas Eve. As a postman I must have had a profound effect on one chap because, as he walked by I heard him say to his mate, "Bloody hell that does it for me, its no wonder all our flaming post is going astray, the post office have taken on a blind chap now, and he is on the bottle!"

Well folks, with that I will big you all farewell as it is now time for me, Babs and Skipper to head off to Ronaldsway Halt for our wander along the banks of the Silverburn River. I have always fancied walking the Silverburn River from its source to its mouth at Castletown harbour. I wonder if we could get this going and make it a sponsored walk for a charity. Let me know what you think and we will get on to it.

July 16, 2008

One day last February I was sitting in the doctor's surgery in Port Erin. I had already been diagnosed with cancer and life in general did not look too wonderful. While I was waiting a lady came over to talk to Barbara and I. She was a friend we used to drink with in the Sidings in my days of frequenting public houses. She said how sorry she was to hear of my situation. Her only problem that day was how to make ice cream in her ice cream maker without most of it sticking to the sides. I can't remember whether Barbara sorted her ice cream problem out but I am deeply saddened today to learn that that same lady is presently in the Royal hospital in Liverpool with leukemia. Back in February she was feeling sorry for me and trying to sort out her ice cream making machine for her kids that night. The poor lady did not know what lay ahead of her. Does this not make you feel grateful for today? Don't take tomorrow for granted. Do whatever you can today, for tomorrow only becomes yours when it becomes today.

I have just returned from my evening jaunt with Barbara and Skipper to Ronaldsway Halt; thank you train driver for blowing your whistle just as I was about to open the gate to cross the line. Normally I can hear the steam train coming from miles away. This morning at Ronaldsway I heard the train leaving Castletown station. However, this afternoon I was just about to open the gate when the train appeared from nowhere. He blew his whistle but I'm not sure if that was because he saw me opening the gate or he was just bored and blew his whistle anyway.

It is now time now to say good luck to Geordie and Margaret Adamson. Geordie was the lighthouse keeper at Douglas head and at the Calf of Man. He is now retired and tomorrow Geordie and his wife Margaret are heading up to the Orkney Islands, the land of their birth. For the next month or so he will be swapping Old Spanish Head for the Old Man of Hoy. For our overseas readers, the Old Man of Hoy is the highest cliff in the UK at 1100 feet high on the Isle of Hoy in the Orkney Islands, which are just a few miles north of Scotland.

Talking of old men, I remember once when I was a small boy, walking down the road towards the beach in Castletown, I met old Mr. Quayle. He was pushing a wheelbarrow with a lawnmower in it. He stopped to talk with me and I remember thinking to myself, it will be a very long time before I am as old as Mr. Quayle. Now, I am not so far behind him and will be lucky if I reach the age he did.
Eileen Harper, a blog reader who is a friend and neighbour from across the road, sent me this poem called ‘Crabby Old Man’. I can relate to it, especially after my recent trips to hospitals.

Until tomorrow folks this is Tom Glassey with News at... oh, hell, left my watch downstairs. Anyway I am still on the banks of the Silverburn river.

P.S. I have just learned that the lady with leukaemia I spoke of earlier in the blog, has just died. I am so lucky and grateful to be sitting here writing this. Others are not so lucky, and cancer doesn’t care who we are, how old we are or who relies on us. It just strikes, and sometimes with devastating effect. Just to reinforce what I said earlier about not taking tomorrow for granted. I began this blog with a smile on my face, and I finish it with eyes full of tears. That is how things can change in the 15 minutes it has taken me to write this piece, let alone a day.

I conclude with the poem, not because it has any relevance to my departed friend but simply because it teaches us not only what to look for in folk, but also how to look.

Crabby Old Man
What do you see nurses?. . . What do you see?
What are you thinking. . . when you're looking at me?
A crabby old man . . . not very wise,
Uncertain of habit. . . . with faraway eyes?

Who dribbles his food . . .and makes no reply.
When you say in a loud voice . . . 'I do wish you'd try!'
Who seems not to notice . . . the things that you do .
And forever is losing. . . . a sock or shoe?

Who, resisting or not. . . lets you do as you will,
With bathing and feeding. . . the long day to fill?
Is that what you're thinking?. . . Is that what you see?
Then open your eyes, nurse. . . you're not looking at me.

I'll tell you who I am. . . as I sit here so still,
As I do at your bidding . . . as I eat at your will.
I'm a small child of ten . . . with a father and mother,
Brothers and sisters . . . who love one another.

A young boy of sixteen . . . with wings on his feet,
Dreaming that soon now . . . a lover he'll meet.
A groom soon at twenty. . . my heart gives a leap,
Remembering, the vows. . . that I promised to keep.

At twenty-five now. . . I have young of my own,
Who need me to guide . . . and a secure happy home.
A man of thirty . . . my young now grown fast,
Bound to each other. . . with ties that should last.

At forty, my young sons . . . have grown and are gone,
But my woman's beside me. . . to see I don't mourn.
At fifty, once more. . . babies play 'round my knee,
Again we know children. . . my loved one and me.

Dark days are upon me . . . my wife is now dead.
I look at the future. . . I shudder with dread.
For my young are all rearing. . . young of their own.
And I think of the years . . .and the love that I've known.

I'm now an old man . . . and nature is cruel.
Tis jest to make old age . . . look like a fool.
The body, it crumbles . . . grace and vigor depart.
There is now a stone . . . where I once had a heart.

But inside this old carcass . . . a young man still dwells,
And now and again. . . my battered heart swells.
I remember the joys . . . I remember the pain.
And I'm loving and living . . . life over again.

I think of the years all too few . . . gone too fast.
And accept the stark fact . . . that nothing can last.
So open your eyes, people . . . open and see,
Not a crabby old man, look closer . . . see . . . ME!!

July 17, 2008

On Monday evening we drove to Ronaldsway Halt along with Skipper. After crossing the railway line and passing through the gate on the river side of the crossing, we headed for the little wooden foot bridge that spans the Silverburn a few yards up river from the railway crossing. We crossed the bridge and I sat on the steps while Barbara and Skipper foraged deep in to the meadow. There was a breeze from the southwest that made the wheat on the meadow side of the river make a sort of fizzing sound. Beneath the bridge, the Silverburn River tumbled over the stones as it meandered its way to Castletown Harbour a couple of miles to the southwest. Every so often Skipper came bouncing through the long grass as if he were checking that I hadn’t moved on without him. He seemed torn between Barbara in the meadow and me

sitting on the bridge. A couple of ducks flew over head quacking as they passed, no doubt heading south to my own garden where they would be fed had we been there. They would wait though, until we got back. They are well schooled now and when Barbara walks down to feed them every evening at around teatime, the sound of our garden gate serves as a feeding bell for over 100 ducks, geese and swans to gather at the feeding station, which is at the bottom of our garden on the Silverburn. From somewhere within the meadow in front of me, a pheasant called out. Behind me a gathering of chaffinches chatted amongst each other. A half mile to my left a heard of cows were munching on the rich pasture. The deep throated moo, the chatter of the chaffinches, the quack of the ducks, the pheasants, the wind blowing through the wheat, the steam train in the distance clattering its way to Port St Mary, and the noise of the water rippling over the stones all sounded as though there was a conductor somewhere up in the sky organizing the whole thing, waving his/her baton and everyone knowing their part and joining in with perfect timing. I sat there on the bridge and I thought to myself, “Yes, wasn’t all this worth fighting for”. This is what it has been all about. Cancer was never going to take these things from me. Barbara and Skipper had blended in to the landscape. They were now part of the meadow. The meadow and everything that was now in it was everything to me. It was as though I had just emerged from a dark tunnel, and had now stepped out into a fairytale. But this was no fairytale, what was happening was real. This meadow was not a figment of my imagination. I have fought like a demon, and will continue to fight. Life is worth fighting for, and everything and everyone you love is your reward. I am a soldier fighting against cancer. Some of my allies have fallen fighting the cause. I must fight on, not just for me, but for them as well, and for the folks they have left behind. Good does emerge from cancer though. It teaches you not to take what you have for granted, and more importantly to fight for what you have and to fully appreciate it. When you rise from your sick bed after cancer treatment, the birds sing that much sweeter, the air you breathe is that much purer. The river, the sea, and the meadows I roamed before are now so much more special to me. I wake each morning, and I am grateful. At the end of each day, I sleep easy because I too am now part of that wonderful meadow, and I can see the conductor’s baton clearly now where before it was just a haze. Yes, there are positives, even in cancer. All is well people.

July 18, 2008

I woke up this morning at 5:45. The rain was hammering down then and that is still the case and the time is now 9 a.m. I have not walked Skipper yet as I am hoping the rain will take a rest soon. However, Manx rain is pretty fit and has lots of stamina.

Today I am tired before I have even done anything. Since returning home from treatment I have noticed that I tire easily these days. I am usually all in after a moderate walk of about 2 miles or so. At present I have done nothing at all and yet I am tired. I know though that I must pull myself together and walk Skipper before giving in and lying down again. I will feel better once I have done something, I just don’t feel as guilty having a lie once I have walked or pottered about doing small jobs around the house. Sleep is like money, will all the sweeter be when it has been earned.

Today is going to be a first for me and Barbara. Later this afternoon we will visit the prison. Neither of us has ever visited a prison before. We had a young lad, we will call Martin, working for us. He only came about once a week, to tidy up the garden, sweep out the path and wash down the decking. He was, and hopefully still is, a very agreeable young lad. Nothing was ever too much trouble for him, and he did whatever we asked of him. He even used to take me out on my tandem bicycle. I don’t know what on Earth happened to Martin once he left us, but it seems he became a totally different boy. He is now on remand for a series of offences and generally behaving like a right little toe rag. It is difficult to believe that this quiet, extremely obliging young man that turned up to do work for us every week, keeps pressing the self destruct button on such a regular basis. The police say that when they arrest him he is so co-operative and well mannered; they are at a complete loss to understand what it is that is driving him. I doubt that I will be any the wiser after my visit today, and I am sure it won’t be a pleasant experience for either of us. Anyway I shall report tomorrow on how we get on.

The rain has now stopped so we shall now take Skipper for his morning walk.

I have now returned from the walk. The rain held off until we got out of the car and walked through the gate, then started again in earnest. The ground along the banks of the Silverburn is soggy and the long grass is wet. The rain has a southwesterly stiff breeze to assist it in making your walk as uncomfortable as possible. I will now have a half hour sleep as I have earned it. Okay, my half hour turned in to an hour, but I feel much better.

I am writing Friday’s blog as Thursday unfolds. It will in fact be Friday when you read this. It is now 5:40 p.m. and I have just returned home from the prison and walking Skipper.
I was told by the prison to arrive 10 minutes before my visit time, which was 2:45. We arrived on time and once the locked doors were opened and we passed through, we were taken into another room and asked to place all our possessions in a locker. This included my hankie, wallet, mobile phone, and even my hat. We then passed through to the visiting room. This is a medium sized room with about 12 tables. The prisoner sits on one side and you on the other. Martin seems in good spirits. He told me he had had plenty of time to think about things and promised me he would never be back here again. Well, I hope not but at present I can’t be sure of that. I get the impression that whatever young Martin is today; he might well be someone else tomorrow. He does have a girlfriend, and she has been to visit him so he does have a certain amount of stability in his life, and more importantly something to work for and above all, hope. I really do hope he pulls himself together and we will do whatever we can to assist him with this. I have asked him to make me a lighthouse with matches. Making items from matches it seems is part of the therapy in there. We will visit Martin again soon.

Well folks, this just about concludes my day today. I shall now have tea, a pair of Moore’s kippers, and chill out for a while, before retiring to bed.

July 19. 2008

Last February when I first began writing this blog, which was just after I had been diagnosed with lung cancer, I was unaware that an American lawyer was also suffering a similar fate. Some of my blogs have found their way across the Atlantic and hopefully have played a small part in aiding her recovery. As far as I know she is still going through the various stages of chemotherapy. She is updating everyone by keeping a thread going. Well I am not exactly sure what a thread is, but it seems it is something similar to a blog only its appears to be a two way thing. Barbara is keeping tabs on this venture. Isn’t it strange though when you tap out your blog each day, you have absolutely no idea of where it is going to go, or who it might impact. Going through her thread last night, I noticed she had used the phrase “Why me,” several times. I guess every one of us have at some point or other asked “Why me.” I am glad it was me that was hit by lung cancer, simply because I think you worry more about other people than you do about yourself. When it someone

else that is suffering with a terrible disease there is not much you can do about it only stand by and watch and utter words of comfort, when its you, you can actually do something about it, you can fight against it, and even if you don't have the strength to fight, you can still console yourself that it is you that is suffering, and not someone you love. So, why not say. "Thank God it is me, and not my wife, son, daughter or whoever." Strangely enough we never say "why me" when something good happens, like a lottery win, or we get a job promotion. Its only when something negative happens. You know, the next time you feel like saying "why me", think of a graveyard, if you were to be able to read all the inscriptions on the headstones, you would never find the words "Why me" and you can't be more sick than dead.

We did not have a gathering this Friday, I'm just not quite up to it just yet, but it won't be long before the gatherings are back in full swing once again. The forecast is not good for this weekend either so it doesn't look like I am going to get out in the boat. Well whatever you have planned for the weekend, I hope you enjoy it. I will be back bashing away at the keyboard on Monday.

July 20, 2008

I woke up at 5:45 yesterday morning. I am starting to wake up at my normal times once again. I also woke up feeling really good. For the first time since I finished with radiotherapy, I woke up with no pain whatsoever. I also ate a bacon sandwich for breakfast, which is something I have not been able to do now for a couple of weeks. I walked Skipper along Castletown beach. We had a stiff westerly breeze which the forecasters said would become a full northwesterly gale by the afternoon. The beach was more or less deserted, well, at least by humans. There were not even many birds to speak off. I guess they are fully aware of the forthcoming gale and have taken shelter. Their brains and senses appear to be much more advanced than the MET's computers. On reaching the far end of the beach, just below Langness, I heard the mournful call of a solitary curlew. On my way back, a raven was enjoying his breakfast amongst the seaweed in a rock pool raven restaurant up on the foreshore. With the entire beach to himself, Skipper bounced around from pool to pool, in wild doggy delirium. The tide had about two hours flood on it, which meant there was a vast amount of sandy beach for us to explore. I say explore because although I have walked on this beach for over 50 years now, every trip to the beach is different. The beach is washed twice a day by the tide, and those tides are fanned by at least 20 to 30 gales a year. Between the storms and tides, they have filled the beach with garbage and swept it clean since the beginning of time. Yes I know we have several beach cleans by humans from time to time; however, we are only cleaning up what other humans have put there.

Well, after my trip to the beach, I sat in my office feeling rather smug. For the first time since February, I am feeling free from the clutches of cancer. I might not be, of course. This might just be a little respite, I can't be sure of anything. What I do know is that I am feeling better than I have done for a very long time. I must go by what I actually feel like and not necessarily by what some computer screen tells a doctor. My lungs feel free and are breathing easily without effort.

Soon after I was told I had cancer, I recall writing on the blog that I didn't know what positives would come out of cancer and I would probably have to wait and see. Well I can tell you there are positives even in cancer. If you are lucky enough to come through your treatment there certainly is light at the end of the cancer tunnel. Firstly you become much more appreciative of all the things you once took for granted. Having the ability to walk down your garden without getting out of breath, being able to walk the dog again, the every day sounds that surround you like the birds, the stream, the wind in your face and children playing, yes, and even the sound of traffic, all these things sound a whole lot sweeter than they did before. Your friends and family now mean so much more to you. Last winter I remember sitting in the house one Saturday afternoon listening to a football match and thinking to myself, what I will do when the football season ends on Saturday afternoons. Good job I didn't know I would be busy dealing with cancer. So, I am not even going to wonder what is it I will do once the boating season finishes in September. Having cancer has taught me to be grateful if I reach September.

July 21, 2008

Good day folks. I begin today by saying a big hello and welcome to Pauline in South Carolina USA. Pauline has emailed me and has become the latest blog reader from the US. She left Castletown with her husband Mike when Castle Industries went to the States and I am not sure when that was. We almost have as many US readers now as we do Manxies. Mind you, Pauline is very much a Manxie. Not only is she from my hometown of Castletown, but from the same housing estate on Janet's Corner. America of course is a truly wonderful country, and we have much to be grateful to them for. I would not be sitting here writing this blog if it was not for the American computer buff who invented or created the software for me to be able to read a computer screen, and write on a computer keyboard. I would not be able to navigate my boat if it were not for the talking navigation system I use on board.

There are of course many other reasons I, and many others are indebted to the USA. Just after I had been diagnosed with cancer, a very kind person offered to pay for me to be sent to the US and be treated. I thanked them and declined the offer. I have no doubt that I would have received top class treatment in the US. However, America's graveyards are not full of centenarians. If you believe that the grass is greener elsewhere, then you will probably always believe that, wherever you are and you will never find rest, or be at peace. America is a great country, if you are wealthy, and healthy. However, I think it is not quite so attractive if you are sick and poor.

I heard on the news this morning that because of rising fuel prices some people are having central heating oil nicked from their tanks, and coal from their bunkers. I recall an occasion back in the 60's when I lived on Janet's Corner. Someone had been swiping coal from our coal cellar. I decided to surprise my Dad and catch the culprit, so I stayed awake one night listening for a noise out the back although I think I must have nodded off. However on waking at around 3 in the morning, I could hear a noise out the back, so I dashed from my bed in a bid to nail the so and so. It was a windy night. I picked up a shovel at the back door and opened the door very quietly so as not to disturb the thief. I could hear a plastic bag rustling in the yard, which I thought, was the thief making off with our coal. I rushed at where the noise was coming from with shovel at the ready, only to crash head first into the iron railings at the end of the yard that the plastic bag had been blowing up against in the wind. I am glad it was 3 o'clock in the morning. At least that meant that no one else had heard me shout. "Got ya, you bloody so and so!" as I rushed the rails with the shovel.

July 22, 2008

I woke this morning at 2:45 a.m. and I have been awake since. Yes, it's going to be a long day. On the radio this morning I heard about a lady who has run around the world to raise money for cancer research and promote cancer awareness. She began her 20,000-mile round the block jog back in 2001. Today she passes through Carlisle and will finish in her hometown in Wales later this week. She is doing all this because she lost her husband to cancer and couldn't stand the

loneliness. I bet there are a few people out there who may have sponsored her for a pound a mile and might now be regretting it. What a brave lady she is, she certainly will be able to say forever more that she got up off her backside and did something about her plight. The story also reminded me of the lady from Leeds whose name eludes me at present. I know her first name was Jane, and she raised a fortune, running and cycling around Europe for cancer charities, before cancer itself finally killed her just a few months ago. These stories have made me ask myself, what I can do to assist mankind in this fight against this deadly disease. Well I doubt that I will be able to do anything as dramatic as run around the world. 20,000 miles is a hell of a walk for a guide dog, and if I tried to cycle across Europe I would probably cause more problems than I would be likely to resolve. None-the-less, my thinking cap is now on, as I have been inspired by these wonderful people. I have no doubt that if they were politicians, they would be knighted, and probably become Lords and Ladies. However, the more likely outcome will be that they will appear on today's news, and then be confined to the archives. The lady who lost her husband to cancer and has now ran around the world, lost her husband because he did not report a lump early enough. Had he done so, he would probably still be with us today.

No one wants to be told they have cancer. I thought I might have cancer for quite a while before I confronted my problems by seeing a doctor. I probably would be dead now if it had not been for Barbara nagging me to go and see a doctor. Cancer usually begins its career by appearing as a small and seemingly insignificant lump somewhere, or in the case of lung cancer, a cough that just gets more and more persistent. In my case I began to start feeling breathless just carrying out my normal daily tasks. If you have developed any of these symptoms, go and check them out now with your doctor. If you have a family member or friend, do whatever it takes to make them go and seek medical advice. You will probably save your life or maybe someone else by getting an early diagnosis. Now I usually try to finish with a little humour. So, just to reinforce my point regarding cancer beginning its life in a seemingly insignificant manner, here is a little story, which demonstrates this point and comes to me courtesy of Marla in Los Angeles, USA.

A mouse looked through the crack in the wall to see the farmer and his wife open a package.
What food might this contain? The mouse wondered - he was devastated to discover it was a mousetrap.
Retreating to the farmyard, the mouse proclaimed the warning:
There is a mousetrap in the house! There is a mousetrap in the house!
The chicken clucked and scratched, raised her head and said, 'Mr. Mouse, I can tell this is grave concern to you, but it is of no consequence to me.'' I cannot be bothered by it.'
The mouse turned to the pig and told him, 'There is a mousetrap in the house! There is a mousetrap in the house!'
The pig sympathized, but said, I am so very sorry, Mr. Mouse, but there is nothing I can do about it but pray. Be assured you are in my prayers.'
The mouse turned to the cow and said 'There is a mousetrap in the house! There is a mousetrap in the house!'
The cow said, 'Wow, Mr. Mouse. I'm sorry for you, but it's no skin off my nose.'
So, the mouse returned to the house, head down and dejected, to face the farmer's mousetrap alone.
That very night a sound was heard throughout the house -- like the sound of a mousetrap catching its prey.
The farmer's wife rushed to see what was caught. In the darkness, she did not see it was a venomous snake whose tail the trap had caught. The snake bit the farmer's wife. The farmer rushed her to the hospital, and she returned home with a fever.
Everyone knows you treat a fever with fresh chicken soup, so the farmer took his hatchet to the farmyard for the soup's main ingredient.
But his wife's sickness continued, so friends and neighbors came to sit with her around the clock.
To feed them, the farmer butchered the pig.
The farmer's wife did not get well; she died.
So many people came for her funeral; the farmer had the cow slaughtered to provide enough meat for all of them.
The mouse looked upon it all from his crack in the wall with great sadness.
So, the next time you hear someone is facing a problem and think it doesn't concern you, remember -- when one of us is threatened, we are all at risk.
We are all involved in this journey called life. We must keep an eye out for one another and make an extra effort to encourage one another.

July 23, 2008

Well folks, this week will see the kids off from the schools for the long summer holidays. As a kid, this time of year was pure magic for me. Just the idea of coming home from school in Liverpool for two whole months sent the blood pulsing through my veins. Long before my shoes touched the timber deck of the Isle of Man steamers, my head would be full of thoughts of the beach, Langness, romping along the Silverbur River, and chasing balls and tin cans during the evenings through Castletown's narrow streets. On wet nights we didn't argue about what channel to watch on the telly as there were only two channels, BBC and ITV, and as far as we kids were concerned, both were rubbish. We did listen to the wireless, but only at nighttime, to radio Luxembourg. Manx Radio didn't exist, so how did we get our news or skeet? Well, I suppose we made most of it up. The rumour mill was going big time then. Jim Callaghan the former British Prime minister once said, "A lie is halfway round the world before the truth has got its boot on." Well in our case in Castletown, a lie had circumnavigated the world three times before the truth had got out of bed. Most rumours began in the shops. Someone would tell a porkie in the butchers, forgive the pun, the lie would make its way over to the bakers, down the street to Kelly's hardware shop, in to the post office, then back up the street and begin all over again. Each time someone would put a little extra spin on it. If it began in the butchers with how Mrs. Quayle had slipped whist putting out the washing and scratched her nose, by the time the rumour had done the rounds, Mrs. Quayle might well be on her way to Malew graveyard having committed suicide by flinging herself off the cliffs at Scarlett. The pub was also another ideal place to plant a rumour. I can tell you that Jesus is not the only person to rise from the dead. A lady in Castletown did this also back in the early 70's. I recall one Friday night sitting in the Duck's Nest, my local pub. Someone came in and told us that Maud had died. We all knew Maud; she was one of our locals. Of course we dug in to our pockets and raised a small amount in the collection that ensued. I recall vividly the hush that came over the busy pub on that Friday night as Maud walked into the pub. Of course she noticed the pittance that was in the collection box so, feeling sorry for the poor devil we were collecting for; she placed a few pence in the box. Our relationship with Maud remained a little strained thereafter, once she realized the collection was for her. I'm not sure who it was that blabbed and let the cat out of the bag though. It was decided that we should all have a drink from the proceeds, but I think there was only enough for about one pint. Anyway I'm sure we will have more than made up for it when Maud finally did pass away, Well, I would like to think so!

July 24, 2008

I have just returned from my morning romp with Skipper. We have Barbara's Aunty May staying with us this week. She is 79 and lives in Warrington. She made her way here on the *Sea Slug* last Monday and completed successfully her first ever journey on her own. This morning as she has done every morning, she accompanied Barbara, Skipper and myself

along the Silverburn. We began our trek from Ronaldsway Halt. Aunty May can't believe that this is actually a real railway station. Tomorrow we shall prove it by taking the train from Castletown and getting off at Ronaldsway. This morning after crossing the line, we took the foot bridge and headed north towards Ballasalla. As I wandered through the meadow, with Skipper bouncing along and stopping to roll in the long grass from time to time, I started thinking about the plight of the wildlife in the meadow. Having listened to the news this morning before setting off, it occurred to me just how lucky the birds and bees actually are. For a start, they don't have a credit crunch problem as they all appear to live within their means. They aren't worried about the present state of the mortgage market as they build all their own houses. They are not concerned about their kid's education or any cockup in the exam ratings, as they have an education system that has stood the test of time for billions of years. The kids simply learn everything they need to know from their parents. They don't have a carbon foot print problem either. They simply sod off to where ever they choose under their own steam. Neither are they worried about the state of play in Iraq, Iran, or anywhere else. They do however have major concerns regarding the bloody magpies in the next tree, or the sparrow hawk in the next field. At least these are real concerns that do actually carry a real threat, for nothing in the meadow has any political spin attached to it. It occurred to me that our politicians, if they really wanted to learn about life, could do a lot worse than simply take themselves off and sit in the meadow for a couple of hours. I guess this will not happen though unless we can find a meadow that has a 5 star hotel within it, and an all-singing and dancing conference centre. Oh, and of course, it would have to be situated in the Caribbean, or some other exotic place far from the banks of the Silverburn. For me the meadow is a wonderful university. You don't need any 'A' levels to get there. You don't need any Government grants, so you don't emerge from there up to your eyes in debt, and yes it really is true that we can learn so much from the birds and the bees.

Now then, our walk this morning was entirely in the parish of Malew. Needless to say, we didn't sing, loiter in church doorways, or drop a stink bomb. Anyone who has read our local newspaper this week will be aware of the new bylaws about to be brought in by Malew Commissioners. These new bylaws have also been approved by Tynwald, which surely is living proof that we have, now in power, the daftest Government, and the most idiotic bunch of commissioners since before the Vikings came. The new bylaws, for the benefit of our off Island readers, will prohibit singing and loud noises in the street, loitering in church doorways, and the dropping of stink bombs. Farting is fine. So presumably is the dropping of rotten eggs. Just don't drop a stink bomb. Maybe Malew commissioners would like to explain as to where you can buy stink bombs these days. There is to be no singing or swearing in the streets either. Okay, if you are a postman, milkman, or street cleaner, just don't show any enjoyment or contentment for your job. Singing or whistling as you work could cost you up to £2500. Don't forget you must not loiter in any church doorway either. The only folk who will be complying with these ridiculous byelaws will be the poor sods that leave Malew Church in their coffins. Ah, but if they loiter in the church doorway on the way in or out they will stick another £2500 on top of the already outrageous funeral bills. These are the same commissioners who a few years ago thought it would be a good idea to have dog muck DNA tested so that they could trace the dog owners. They were surprised at the interest shown in this barking mad idea from around the world. They assumed that because there was so much interest that it must be a good idea. It simply passed them by that it was because it was such a half-baked load of utter nonsense, and that was the only reason there was interest. No one else could believe they could be so damn stupid.

July 25, 2008

Well I guess I will start by explaining that at present I am writing the blog the day before you actually read it. I have found that if I write the blog through the day, Barbara can just come along and post it onto the site at around 7 a.m. This also gives me the chance to update the blog in the morning if necessary.

So, it is now 10 a.m. on Thursday morning. We were supposed to be taking Aunt May on the steam train to Ronaldsway Halt today but it has fallen through. We could not be bothered hanging around until 10:40, the time of the first train, so we all headed off to the beach instead. Anyway Skipper enjoyed the beach, and Aunty May enjoyed the fact that there was at least 70 miles of seawater between her and Warrington. Barbara picked some Sorrel and Milk Thistle to feed her cockatiels and canaries. Barbara has been studying her wild plants through a book her sister Janet has bought her; she has also been getting lessons from Andrew Qualtrough, who is Castletown's answer to David Attenborough. When we lived in Ramsey, our old friend Albert Garrett use to say, "There is a cure for every illness in the world out there in the garden, if we only knew what it was". So, I guess it can do no harm to know your plants. A little knowledge certainly would have been handy last year when we unknowingly grew a huge cannabis plant in our back garden. We think the seed must have got there from the birdseed we buy from a supplier of bird food. We watered it and generally nurtured it until one day someone came along who explained what it was. The plant mysteriously disappeared soon after!

When I was a kid, I once found a lobster pot floating in my back garden. Someone had thrown it there. It had a couple of holes in it and was obviously now useless. However, it was made of iron. So, it felt like a sort of iron football. Someone told me it was a bomb. At that time they were building the clinic at Janet's Corner next to our house. I thought it would be exciting to hear the bomb explode, and I couldn't wait to hear the sound of the clinic being blown up. I remember getting really excited at the thought of my bomb blowing the clinic to smithereens. I stood with one hand clutching the iron railings and with the other I fired my bomb over the railings and in to the wall of the clinic. I did not know buildings could talk, and even if they did talk, of all buildings you don't expect a clinic to swear. Leslie was, and I hope still is, a really nice guy. He had been working on the clinic building since the start of the job. Every evening at the end of his stint, he used to take me for a spin on his motorbike. As far as I know, he made a full recovery from being hit full on by my lobster pot iron bomb.

My mate David who lives across the road from me called round for a drink last night. Aunty May bought me the most fantastic cognac you could ever wish to taste. Anyway I was not going to give Dave any of that, so I dug out a few tins of John Smith's, the drink I used to like when I was a commoner. Anyway Dave calling round reminded me of the time about 30 years ago when he came home on leave from the Navy. He rang me from Douglas and asked me to meet him in the Wheatsheaf pub. I made my way into Douglas on the bus. After finding my way to the Wheatsheaf, I decided to visit the toilet before going in to the bar. I was not familiar with this pub so I was a sort of feeling my way around. Having found the toilet, I then had to locate the trough, which would be situated usually on a tiled wall. I made my way towards it with my hands stretched out. The trouble was, a chap was standing there having a pee when I pushed him right into the trough. He let out a loud yell, which took me back a bit. Anyway I said to him. "If only you had yelled out a few seconds ago, you would not now have to go home and change your trousers!"

Well people that is it for today. Aunty May now wants to go to the market in Castletown. Of course I will be back tomorrow.

July 26, 2008

I woke this morning at around 4 a.m., and of course I have been awake since. It is now 8.5am. My favourite part of the day is at the point of wakeup. It is simply just so exciting to glance at your watch and see that it is 4 or 5 a.m.; a brand new day, those first gulps of virgin air, the sound of the dawn chorus as yet unspoiled by traffic noise, aircraft, telephones, and flaming police sirens.

It seems to me that every police car these days are on their way to an emergency. If that is the case, wouldn't that make every Manx Radio news bulletin about 3 hours long? I have the greatest respect for the ambulance service, but sorry, I simply do not take the police seriously any longer. They go hurtling along our roads at great speed, yet they take an absolute age to turn up at the scene of a crime or to respond to anyone who calls them.

Well that's my beef for today. Yesterday it was the Malew Commissioners; today it's the police. Mind you if all these new byelaws passed by Malew Commissioners are implanted, the police really will be busy chasing round Ballasalla making sure no one is singing, loitering, or dropping stink bombs.

Now as I was saying I woke early this morning, and as I lay there tossing and turning I got to thinking about some of the old boy's that have past on. One of them that came in to mind was a chap called Possie. Every Manxman from Santon southwards will have met or heard of Possie. Unfortunately he died last year. He was a Cregneash man and spent many of his years at sea as a master mariner. He ended his working days in Port St. Mary as a lobster fisherman. He then became one of the few tax exiles I have known to have left the Isle of Man. Possie it seems, was of the opinion that people who live on the coast shouldn't have to pay anything to the inland revenue! He finished up living on the Wirral, so presumably he continued with his philosophy over there!

Dear old Aunty May has been out and bought me yet another bottle of Calvados brandy, so I shall drink to Possie's memory tonight. Yes tonight I hope the first gathering will take place since my little holiday over in Clatterbridge. Barbara has just returned from taking Aunty May back to the boat. An extremely heavy rain shower has just concluded, and talking of concluding, that is now what I must do. My parting tip for this week is, be careful about asking the advice of an expert. An ex is a 'has been', and a spert is a drip under pressure.

July 28, 2008

This weekend has been the Southern agricultural show. Saturday of the show used to be a really special day for my Dad. He loved going to the show to meet up with old farming friends. Some of those old farming hands only met up once a year, and that was on show day. When we were kids, every year we all used to troop off to the show. My younger brother Kevin and I even made a few quid selling programmes one year. I say one year because we were never invited back to sell programmes for a second time. We didn't mind though. No one actually told us that we were not allowed to keep the money we made. Needless to say, Peggy Watterson's toy shop did rather well from our enterprise, and looking back I can now understand why she asked us several times the following year, if we would be selling programmes at the show again! When I got older, I used to accompany Dad to the show and spend more or less the entire afternoon in the beer tent. I recall one year, after circumnavigating the show field, we headed for the beer tent. We met up with Frankie Quayle from Purt le Moirrey and Ley Kinvig. We drank and sang the whole afternoon until chucking out time, needless to say, when they started calling last orders we were in know mood for leaving. Frankie headed up to the bar to buy the so-called last round and returned with a full crate of Castletown Nut browns. He placed the crate of 24 nut browns on the floor and instructed us to gather round the crate. After several very loud renditions of 'Michael Row the Boat Ashore', (Frankie's favourite song) the nut browns slowly began to disappear, however, they were not disappearing quickly enough for the barman's liking. His pitiful and desperate pleas for us to drink up and leave the tent might as well have been uttered in Japanese. As Frankie launched in to his 15th verse of 'Michael Row the Boat Ashore', aided and abetted by Ley Kinvig threatening to punch the barman's lights out should the barman try to knick our crate, the tent began to collapse around our heads. However, we soldiers of the brewery, gallantly led by Frankie who was by now belting out the 25th verse of 'Michael Row the Boat', made our way with the crate of nut browns to the outside field where we completed our little session without any further hassle. The day at the show was completed by my brother, Odd Job, real name Kevin, collecting third prize for his spuds. Yes, the very spuds he had bought in the Co-op earlier in the week. With our crate of beer drunk, all left the show field and headed for the pub where we carried on drinking. Eventually, on leaving the pub, we would all be in agreement that we had had a wonderful day out. We did not know who had won any prizes, we had not witnessed any horse jumping, dog obedience, sheep shearing or anything else remotely to do with agriculture, yet we had been to the show and had a great day out.

Around that time, we were known as the Saturday afternoon Shore Hotel gang. My Dad was a landscape gardener with his brother in law and uncle to me, Norman Gregson. They worked hard through the week and by the week I mean often 7 days a week. The only time they didn't work would be Saturday afternoon. Sundays were fine and Saturday mornings were in order, however, hell or high water would not get them to work on Saturday afternoons. Saturday afternoons were put aside for a session in the Shore Hotel at Gansey. The session would usually start at about 1 p.m. and consisted of Dad, Norman, Ley Kinvig, Frankie Quayle, Mrs Kinvig, my brother Lenny and sometimes me. The whole event was chaired by landlady, Helen Armstrong. By about 3:30 Frankie Quayle would be rowing Michael ashore. By 4 o'clock he would be belting out verse 21 and by 4:30, he would be standing on the windowsill kicking out in his wellies in beat with the song. By 5 one of his wellies would be nestling somewhere on the other side of the bar, possibly having clipped some poor sod on the head as it flew off whilst he went through the actions of rowing the boat as well as pounding out the song. By 6 o'clock the noise would be horrendous, as Norman Gregson would now be belting out his own version of Shaky, Shaky Baby! Frankie would be up to about verse 49, Ley Kinvig would be threatening to go and find some real singers, and challenging Alan Philips the barman who was a wrestler, to a duel. Mrs. Kinvig would be uttering words of disgust from her bar stool. At about 7:30 or there about, we would all pile in to the ambulance to be driven home. The ambulance served during the week as a works van for carrying lawn mowers and the likes. Dad and Norman had bought the ambulance from the hospital as a works van. On arriving home we would have to face Mother's wrath. We would make out that we had only had a few but of course she knew that we had not taken 7 or 8 hours to down two glasses of beer. Dad's dinner was usually hidden somewhere, and sometimes we found it, and sometimes we didn't. I remember on one occasion returning home after a Saturday session and not being able to find Father's dinner. The next day I went to put something in the tumble dryer, and on pressing the start button the ensuing noise made us think that every nut and bolt has come loose inside the machine. It turned out that Mother had hidden Dad's dinner in there the day before and forgotten about it. So, when I turned it on, the whole lot, spuds, meet, veg and gravy whirled round and round inside the machine. It would have been a lot less hassle just to give him his dinner than to clean up the bloody mess. Never mind the lesson was learned that tumble dryers were not the best places to hide meals in. You couldn't really blame her for being mad, and we always said never again. However, we did, time and time again. My Uncle Norman's wife Trudy also became something of an expert in what to do with cooked dinners for husbands that don't come home. One Saturday evening she simply turned up at the Shore Hotel and fired Normie's din dins right across the bar, meat, veg, gravy, plate and knife and fork. The whole damn lot went flying across the bar. We may have even gathered it up in one of Frankie's

discarded wellies. All this took place back in the 70's. Many of the Shore Hotel Gang are now dead, Dad, my younger brother Kevin, Ley Kinvig. I think Frankie is in a home, and landlady Helen, is still going strong. Those of us who are left probably spend our Saturday afternoons just a tad more sedately these days. During the week, I will tell you about the time a pig became one of the Saturday afternoon gang and took a ride in the ambulance.

July 29, 2008

Well, I promised to explain the pig in the ambulance story, apologies to those of you who have read my book. For a number of years Dad kept some lives stock on a small piece of land on the airport road. We had goats, a couple of young calves, 2 or 3 sheep, a little Welsh Cob pony, and a couple of pigs. It once got to the stage where we had too much goat's milk, so we started feeding large quantities of it to one of the pigs. By the time Mr.Pig was ready for the slaughterhouse, he weighed in at around 16 stone. Pig was duly loaded in to the ambulance, and with Dad in the passenger's seat, Uncle Norman set about driving the ambulance and pig to the slaughter house. As Normie took the blackboards corner, the pig broke loose and clambered on to Norman's back and sank his teeth into his neck. Norman put the ambulance in to the ditch whilst Father attacked Mr. Pig with a sledgehammer. The pig surrendered and took his place in the back of the ambulance once again. However, the passing coaches containing visitors and Lord only knows who else, must have wondered what kind of a place they had just arrived in as they stumbled across an ambulance, with a pig on top of the drive, under attack from the man sat in the passenger seat.

Well now, I have been going on a bit lately regarding some of the very silly laws that are being passed these days. Its not just around here either. It seems to me that the whole world is going completely round the bend, well at least the politicians that run the Western World. It seems that if I have one glass of brandy a night, I'm fine. However, if I have two I have a drinking problem. We are told to take the kids to McDonalds, but make them eat lettuce baps. We are told to cut back on flying and holiday at home. Recently no fewer than 5 MHK's went on a jolly to Gibraltar to attend a seminar on climate change. Politicians must be the only folk on the planet who believe that all you have to do to affect climate change is pass a few laws. I am not sure how the MHK'S reached Gibralter, but surely they wouldn't have flown, would they!!! I keep expecting to hear on the wireless that they have instructed the Steam Packet to replace the *Ben My Chree* with a tall ship. Mind you if the politicians manage to get us out of the air and holidaying at home, they indeed will have all the finest resorts to themselves seeing as they are the only people I know that have a 10 week summer holiday and will therefore be the only folks who have the time to travel to their destination by sailing ship.

Well my friends, we are surrounded by health fanatics. Health fanatics are likely to do more damage than good. Personally I would encourage anyone to pack in smoking. Gosh, look what it did to me. However, I firmly believe that it should be down to people's choice. I think it was Churchill who said, "I might not agree with what you say, but I will defend with my life your right to say it!" We have the right, if we choose, to kill ourselves. Blimey, I almost managed it!

I heard on the wireless the other day, that in Los Angeles they are about to bring in a law that will close down many of the McDonalds outlets. Other health cafés will take their place. In most McDonald outlets these days, they offer a choice of various salads besides their burgers. Surely people already have the choice of whether to eat a burger or not. I can't imagine that many folk actually go to McDonalds to enjoy a nice salad. After all you wouldn't go to the butcher to buy a pound of apples, although I suppose it's only a matter of time before he is made to sell apples and bananas by law.

Now the blog has a wonderful assistant who works away tirelessly for the blog over in Los Angeles. From your emails I know that many of you enjoyed her little story about the mouse. Well our friend Marla has been at it again. This time she has come up with a prediction that has been made by one of her counterparts over there is the US.

HEADLINES FROM THE YEAR 2029
Ozone created by electric cars now killing millions in the seventh largest country in the world, Mexifornia,formerly known as California .

White minorities still trying to have English recognized as Mexifornia's third language.

Spotted Owl plague threatens northwestern United States crops and livestock.

Baby conceived naturally! Scientists stumped.

Couple petitions court to reinstate heterosexual marriage.

Iran still closed off; physicists estimate it will take at least 10 more years before radioactivity decreases to safe levels.

France pleads for global help after being taken over by Jamaica . No other country comes forward to help the beleaguered nation!

Castro finally dies at age 112; Cuban cigars can now be imported legally, but President Chelsea Clinton has banned all smoking.

George Z. Bush says he will run for President in 2036.

Postal Service raises price of first class stamp to $17.89 and reduces mail delivery to Wednesdays only.

85-year $75.8 billion study: Diet and exercise is the key to weight loss.

Average weight of Americans drops to 250 lbs.

Global cooling blamed for citrus crop failure for third consecutive year in Mexifornia and Floruba.

Japanese scientists have created a camera with such a fast shutter speed they now can photograph a woman with her mouth shut.

Abortion clinics now available in every High School in United States.

Senate still blocking drilling in ANWR even though gas is selling for 4532 Pesos per liter and gas stations are only open on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Massachusetts executes last remaining conservative.

Supreme Court rules punishment of criminals violates their civil rights.

Average height of NBA players is now nine feet, seven inches.

New federal law requires that all nail clippers, screwdrivers, fly swatters and rolled-up newspapers must be registered by January 2030

IRS sets lowest tax rate at 75 percent.

Floruba voters still having trouble with voting machines.

It has been a pleasure sounding off to you all again my friends, and all being well, I shall return tomorrow. Until then though, this is Tom Glassey with News from that very wet and timeless zone on the banks of the Silverburn River.

July 30, 2008

It's almost 9 a.m. and the rain is absolutely pouring down. I have just returned from Ronaldsway Halt. It was difficult to know whether I was actually trudging through the river or on the path. It always seems to be pouring rain every time a cruise ship visits Douglas. Today the cruise ship *Black Prince* will arrive at lunchtime. If anyone out there wants to make a quick buck today, then get yourself down to Mouchers market and buy all the umbrellas you can find and locate yourself in the sea terminal from mid morning onwards. Mind you this advice is probably useless as by the time you read this, the *Black Prince* will probably be elsewhere and hopefully so will the rain. Still, it wouldn't do you any harm to have a stock of umbrellas handy, would it!

I have a couple of visitors popping in to see me later this morning. Tony and Jean have traveled over to the Island for a few days from Derbyshire. Tony, like me, has cancer and is undergoing treatment. I met Tony and Jean one night in the Bay Hotel in Port St. Mary about 12 or 13 years ago. Somehow or other they came across the blog just after I began writing it, so the blog has not only introduced me to new friends, but has reunited me with old ones.

Now, the other day I was bashing on about the police tearing round the Island all day in their police cars, sirens belting out and lights flashing and I mentioned that I simply don't believe that they are attending as many emergencies as they would like us to believe. Well it appears it's more or less the same across the water. The blog's foreign correspondent Anna, who lives in Chester, Northwest England files us this report. Although in her story it is actually an American gentleman, it proves my point.

George Phillips, an elderly man, from Meridian, Mississippi, was going up to bed, when his wife told him that he'd left the light on in the garden shed, which she could see from the bedroom window. George opened the back door to go turn off the light, but saw that there were people in the shed stealing things.
He phoned the police, who asked 'Is someone in your house?' He said 'No.' Then they said 'All patrols were busy. You should lock your doors and an officer will be along when one is available.'
George said, 'Okay.' He hung up the phone and counted to 30. Then he phoned the police again.
'Hello, I just called you a few seconds ago because there were people stealing things from my shed. Well, you don't have to worry about them now because I just shot them.' and he hung up.
Within five minutes, six Police Cars, a SWAT Team, a Helicopter, two Fire Trucks, a Paramedic, and an Ambulance showed up at the Phillips' residence, and caught the burglars red-handed. One of the Policemen said to George, 'I thought you said that you'd shot them!'
George said, 'I thought you said there was nobody available!'

July 31, 2008

So here we are on the last day of July. It's a sort of special day for me. Today for the first time since I returned from Clatterbridge, I walked Skipper around the park alone. Yes it was and still is raining, but at least I really do feel now that things just might be starting to get back to normal, whatever normal is.

My friend David from across the road called the other night to tell me that he had booked a cruise on the *Queen Mary* for next September. He and his wife and a couple of friends will cross the Atlantic, then cruise along the East coast of North America and return to Southhampton. He wanted to know if I cared to come with them. For many years my dream was one day to cross the Atlantic by sea. When I was a child in Liverpool I would spend many a day just hanging around the Pier Head, yearning to step aboard some of those fantastic ships and sail away to pastures new. I turned down David's invitation to cross the Atlantic with him, not only on the grounds of cost, but through the years my goals have changed. There was a time when I wanted to make as much money as possible. I wanted to sign up as many clients as I could. I wanted to own the best boat I could afford, and so on. Today that has all changed. Recent events have taught me a great deal about life than I ever learned from any book or teacher. I now wake up each morning and I am so grateful to be able to get up and take the dog for a walk. To wake up free of pain, and above all, to wake up with hope and count my blessings, rather than dwell on how I might increase them. A cruise on the *Queen Mary* is no longer a target; I'm far from convinced I would even enjoy it. Getting dressed up every night and dining on the finest foods just doesn't appeal to me, mind you, I don't think that side of it ever did. I simply wanted to sail across the Atlantic and would have been happy to do it on a coal boat. Today, walking the dog, taking a trip on my own fishing boat in Castletown Bay, or simply having a day out on the Ayres will make me just as happy if not happier.

Yesterday I had a visit from a couple, who follow the blog over in Derbyshire, Northwest England. Tony was recent diagnosed with cancer. He has now been told to basically go home and try to enjoy the rest of his life as it would seem very little can be done for him. His tumour is to close to his heart for him to have chemo or radiotherapy. Tony has simply accepted his prognosis and is getting on with the rest of his life, however long that might be. He remans upbeat and his wonderful wife Jean is keeping his spirits in good shape. I only hope that should I ever be faced with their dilemma, that I would be able to face it with half their fortitude. Strangely enough, as I stood outside my front gate the other day, I got talking to a couple that just happened to be passing. They were from Warrington and were on a daytrip

to Castletown. We chatted for about 10 minutes at the gate and then they went on their merry way to the train station. It turns out that they are staying in the same hotel as Tony and Jean, and when they got back to base, over dinner they explained to Tony and Jean that they had been to Castletown and met this couple called Tom and Barbara. Yes the very same couple that Tony and Jean were coming out to see yesterday.

Now then for those of you that are interested, the cruise ship *Black Prince* sailed for Liverpool over night and arrived there at 8:30 this morning.

August 1, 2008

Hi folks, I want to begin today by saying a big thank you to Bluemonday. I hope Bluemonday reads the blog. If he doesn't then I will have to find some other way of saying thank you to him. Last night I wasted a couple of hours in a debate as to whether Jaffa cakes were biscuits or cakes. This morning I extended the debate to the forum, and Bluemonday gave me a definition of whether the Jaffa is a cake or biscuit. It seems the court decided back in 1991 that the makers of Jaffa cakes didn't want to pay VAT on their products, and so it was left for a court to decide on the true definition of a Jaffa cake. If you wish to wise yourself up on the matter, go to the forum topics and click on Jaffa cake, biscuit or cake. Now then my reason for thanking Bluemonday through the blog is that I have now worked out how to follow topics on the blog. However, I haven't yet fathomed out how to reply to someone. Every time I click on reply my Braille display goes back to the front page. Well I shall bash on trying and hopefully I will resolve the problem in a few days. Now then, Bluemnonday's response to my query has set me thinking. Back in 1991 the court hearing on the definition of a Jaffa cake generated many, many words. The winner of that case made and continues to make a fortune from those words. Those words have probably generated millions, and millions of pounds. It struck me that words are making a fortune for people and business every day. There is probably more money generated in this world from words than from anything else. Well I don't know any lawyers, broadcasters, judges, film stars or best selling authors that live in council houses. I have just done a quick calculation. I began writing this blog back in February. I have now posted 131 posts and written around 100,000 words. The trouble is, I haven't made a bloody penny. What am I doing wrong, or am I no bloody good? I have made absolutely sod all from banging on and on about the weather, the police, our politicians, the state of the health service, and yet a biscuit factory or her Majesty's Government make a flippin' fortune from deciding whether a little round sweet thing is a biscuit or a cake.

I remember an occasion back in the early 70's, when I worked at Davis Charlton. An argument began one day as to whether rhubarb was a fruit or a vegetable. The argument and I say argument rather than debate, as argument it definitely was, began between two old boys at one end of the line. Before long it had engulfed the entire factory. Someone had entered his rhubarb as a fruit in some flower and produce show. He had been turned down on the grounds that the rhubarb was a vegetable. When he took his rhubarb to the veg section, they it seems turned him down on the grounds that the rhubarb was a fruit. Anyway I can't remember if we ever got it sorted. Are you reading Bluemonday! I don't think the two chaps spoke for about a week afterwards.

The blog's very special friend, Elizabeth Wittmann in Milwaukee Wiscosin, has emailed me some very useful tips which I am more than happy to pass on to you.

Peel a banana from the bottom and you won't have to pick the little 'stringy things' off of it. That's how the primates do it.

Take your bananas apart when you get home from the store. If you leave them connected at the stem, they ripen faster.

Store your opened chunks of cheese in aluminum foil. It will stay fresh much longer and not mold!

Peppers with 3 bumps on the bottom are sweeter and better for eating.

Peppers with 4 bumps on the bottom are firmer and better for cooking.

Add a teaspoon of water when frying ground beef. It will help pull the grease away from the meat while cooking

To really make scrambled eggs or omelets rich add a couple of spoonfuls of sour cream, cream cheese, or heavy cream in and then beat them up

For a cool brownie treat, make brownies as directed. Melt Andes mints in double broiler and pour over warm brownies. Let set for a wonderful minty frosting.

Add garlic immediately to a recipe if you want a light taste of garlic and at the end of the recipe if your want a stronger taste of garlic.

Leftover Snickers bars from Halloween make a delicious dessert. Simply chop them up with the food chopper. Peel, core and slice a few apples. Place them in a baking dish and sprinkle the chopped candy bars over the apples. Bake at 350 for 15 minutes!!! Serve alone or with vanilla ice cream. Yummm!

Heat up leftover pizza in a nonstick skillet on top of the stove, set heat to med-low and heat till warm. This keeps the crust crispy. No soggy micro pizza.

Put cooked egg yolks in a zip lock bag. Seal, mash till they are all broken up. Add remainder of ingredients, reseal, keep mashing it up mixing thoroughly, cut the tip of the baggy, squeeze

August 4, 2008

Does anything taste as nice as a mackerel caught on your own rod, brought ashore in your own boat, and then within two hours of landing fried and served up for breakfast? Well maybe. On Sunday morning we went out to Langness walking with Skipper and whilst out there, we picked a bag of mushrooms. Yes, I think the taste of wild mushrooms fried up and served with bacon and eggs probably taste as good as fresh mackerel. I woke up feeling good on Sunday. I have not been so clever these last few days. I don't know why but my skin started to peel again, and the smell of the radiation filled my nose just as it did when I came back from Clatterbridge. As for why I suddenly took a lunge backwards, I really don't know. Anyway thank goodness today I am back fighting fit once again. My wander around Langness was the furthest I have walked since returning from Clatterbridge, about two and a half miles. I did however, do a little cheating.

On reaching the lighthouse I sat on the bench at the end. There was a slight southwesterly breeze. A rising tide had about an hour's flood on it, which meant you could hear the small waves just, beginning to wash over the rocks. The sky sounded as if it was full of skylarks. A single curlew called out from over Fort Island away to the northeast. To the southwest, a couple of seals were deeply engrossed in a seal song. I'm sure it was the seal equivalent of "Oh What a Beautiful Morning." The lapwings provided the seals with a fine accompaniment. Any early morning at Langness, knocks spots of any last night at the proms performance. Skipper bounced around like a ping-pong ball on a trampoline. It was in this very place last October/November that I first began to feel breathless, up until then walking round Langness presented no problems at all to me. Now, I was struggling to get round, and hoping it was something that would just blow over. By January I could hardly walk at all and had given up any hope of ever walking Langness again. This morning I retraced my steps, and although it took a little effort to get round, brought on by the effects of radiation and not breathlessness, it was a real joy to hear the unique sounds and smells of Langness once again.

A doctor friend told me recently, that no matter how hopeless his patient's situation was, he would never leave them without hope. I honestly believe now through my recent experiences, that if you can retain hope, even when everything else deserts you, you have a real chance of recovering from any situation. I believe that we all know when the time is right to let go, and when it comes, we do so without resistance. I believe that we let go readily, because at that point we become aware of something better to cling to. Whether that something is Heaven, an afterlife, or whatever I do not know. I am happy not to know. I see no point in filling my present life with thoughts of what will happen or become of me after death. Whatever it is, it can't be bad. No one ever came back. I love life, and whoever gave me life will bring me death. They have not disappointed me in life, so why should they let me down in death. Now you may well be thinking, 'But you have had cancer twice, and spent all your life in blindness'. My first dice with cancer was when I was two. They removed my eyes to prevent the cancer from spreading. Being blind meant that my life took off in a very different direction than it would have done had I not lost my sight. It meant I grew up learning to love and use sound and smell much more positively than I would have done. I would never have met and married Barbara, she has been a rock to cling to through this second bout of cancer, and has enriched and enhanced my life in so many different ways. I would not have met most of my present friends. I probably would never have grown up with a love of the sea, and therefore derived so much pleasure from it. My second bout of cancer has taught me how special life is. It has taught me not to take life for granted and to be grateful for what I have. Not only to be grateful for what I have, but also I now enjoy them so much more. I took for granted waking each morning and gulping in the beautiful fresh air that drifts in through my bedroom window and is flavoured by the sweet salty waters of Castletown Bay. Or the pure clean air that is filled with the smells of the meadow and music of the birds that dwell in the trees that line the banks of the Silverburn River. Life is so much more special to me now than it was before. Sometimes you really need to walk in the wind and rain, so that you can really appreciate the sunshine, when it comes. I know that some of you, who read this blog, are cancer sufferers. Never loose hope; no matter how hopeless your situation may appear to be. Remember it is worse for your loved ones looking on than it is for you, and surely you would rather carry this load than them. Remember, cancer is only in your body. Your mind and soul will always be free. Just keep tomorrow in your sights. If you always make tomorrow, you will live forever.

August 5, 2008

I have been having some problems these last few days. It has felt as if I have been going backwards. My skin started to peel and dry up again. My eyes began to run again, and all the little devils that plagued me during radiotherapy seem to reappear. Of course I have been out in the sun walking Skipper and now I discover that I am not supposed to venture out in sunlight without some protection Of course I still use the moisturizing creams, but it seems that the cream was not enough. I am now told that I must apply 50 SPF to protect myself from the sun, and probably this will be the situation for the rest of my life. Well that has come as a bit of a shock. None-the-less I suppose it's a small price to pay for my treatment. Well at least now that I know what the cause of my problems has been, things should now start to improve again. Well I have tried cheese and ham so why not give sun cream a go? I have still not managed to get out in my boat *Silverburn* since I returned from Clatterbridge, I hope to put this to rights by the end of this week. I am afraid this blog is on the short side as I am hard pressed for time today.

For our off Island readers, I have included this month's article in Manx Tails.

I owe the people of Merseyside three enormous thank yous. Back in 1955 my parents took me to St. Paul's eye hospital to have my eyes removed. The doctors had decided to remove my eyes in a bid to prevent cancer spreading to my face. They were successful and saved my life. In 1958, Merseyside came to my rescue once again, this time to provide me with a place at a special school for the blind. A school where blind kids could be taught to read and write Braille and generally emerge from there armed with enough knowledge to go on and live a reasonable life. I didn't like school, but how many kids do. I hated being away from home for three months at a time and the nuns who ran the school did not exactly win my favour either. However, I'm sure I didn't like being in St. Paul's hospital, but had it none been for the skill of the doctors at St. Paul's and the dedication of the teachers of St Vincent's School, I would not be sitting here writing this article now. This year Merseyside has come to my rescue once again. In February I was diagnosed with lung cancer, and once again a Merseyside hospital in Clatterbridge took me under their wing and moved Heaven and Earth in a bid to rid me off lung cancer. Of course I also have to be extremely grateful to the fantastic staff at Nobles where I received chemotherapy. I have also learned what a brilliant bunch of staff exists at the DHSS patient transfer department, especially Lynne who arranged all my travel and simply just got on with things every time I called her to make changes to my ferry bookings. My debt of gratitude is not however, limited to the IOM and Merseyside. My radiographers consisted of Sima from Iran, Enailla from Zimbabwe, and Andy from New Zealand. So, the World it seems has come to my rescue. There were many times as I lay on the steel bed with my head strapped down with a mask pulled tightly around my face that I rued the day I began smoking. Some of my smoking friends have said to me that I cannot be sure that it was smoking that brought about my cancer. I say to them, "Oh yes I can be sure. However, you can choose to be unsure if you want to!"

One day I sat in the waiting room waiting my turn for treatment. I started talking to the patient beside me who was also waiting for treatment. He told me that his 9-year-old son had pleaded with him for years to pack in smoking, as he did not want to loose his Dad. As he choked on his tears, he went on to explain how he wished he had complied with his boy's wishes.

I have now walked through yet another cancer storm, and emerged a little battered and bruised. I have difficulty in swallowing. My face, eyes, ears and forehead feel like they have been badly sun burned. My hair has gone. Never the less, I firmly believe I am on my way to recovery. Last February I was told that I probably didn't have very long to live and there wasn't a lot that could be done for me. Well here I am. I have been almost to Hell and back, or was it Heaven?

Well I am probably going to be kicking around on Earth for a little while longer. I have been most fortunate to be looked

after by wonderful people who asked for nothing. I have heard in the news about the so-called terrible state of the British National Health service. Well if Clatterbridge hospital is an example of the NHS, it is the finest institution in the World. Clatterbridge is a fantastic hospital and no one should fear having to go there. It is just a shame I needed to get cancer in order to get there, but believe me it's almost worth it.

Many years ago when I was a small boy of around 10 years of age, my neighbour Captain Jack Ronan was taking me back to my school in Liverpool after I had spent the afternoon onboard his ship alongside the landing stage. As we neared the doors of the convent, Captain Jack spotted a tear in my eyes. He placed a hand on my shoulder and said. "This will all pass. In no time at all it will be history and you will look back on this day." As I lay on my steel bed with my head strapped to the bed and the smell of the radiation filling my nostrils in Clatterbridge, those words bounced around in my mind yet again. Now, Clatterbridge just like the blind school is also history. I have walked through a storm in these last few months. It is true though, being looked after on Merseyside by wonderful people meant that, yes, I did walk through a storm, but I never walked alone.

August 6, 2008

Today the rain is teeming; as I sit here I can hear the swish of the cars passing below my window on the soaking wet roads. It has rained every day this week and I am really grateful to whoever it is that organizes the weather. The sun has been a real headache for me lately. I have had to restrict my movements and apply really strong sun cream as direct sunlight stimulates my radiation. If this glorious rain remains with us, I can be out and about all day. It is much more pleasant to be wet than burnt. Yes of course I can wear protective clothing such as hats and what have you, but they do become a little tiresome after a while. I shall head off to the beach shortly and I guess it will be pretty well empty, the ideal place to take a dog with an ASBO. I have just checked out the AIS, and I note that there are no cruise ships in Douglas today. Well I guess that sort of proves that the rain is not just kept back purely for the cruise passengers. I suppose that most folk who are on holiday on the island today will be disappointed at having to spend a day in the rain. For an island where it rains a lot we don't actually cater very well for rainy days. It's not always a negative though. You might take shelter in a pub or café today and strike up a new friendship with someone that will last for the rest of your life. You might end up visiting a museum or art gallery, and having a really good day out and maybe even buying a painting that ends up adorning your lounge wall giving you much pleasure for many years. Of course you might end up just sitting at home or in your hotel room being thoroughly miserable. I guess it's up to you. Whatever you do it's always a good idea not to set your expectation levels too high. Sometimes we hope for better things but have to accept what we are given rather than what we might have wanted. Always be aware of the story of the blind man pushing his friend in a wheelchair through the desert.

The blind man had been pushing his pal through the desert in the hot sun for hours. Both men had become very tired and thirsty. All of a sudden, the man in the wheelchair spotted an oasis. He guided the blind man to the edge of a small lake. The blind man could not contain himself and leapt into the lake. As the blind man emerged on the other side of the lake fully refreshed and cooled from the hot sun, he discovered to his astonishment that he had regained his eyesight. He danced around the lake in wild delirium. "For Heaven's sake," said his wheelchair bound friend. "Will you please stop bouncing around like a loon and push me in to the damn lake!" The former blind man gave the wheelchair a ruddy great shove and it hurtled into the lake. As the chair emerged on the other side of the lake, the man looked down to find a new pair of tyres on his on his wheelchair!

August 7, 2008

I'm just about to have breakfast. Well it's a good job I'm not hungry. I have been out in the fields to collect my breakfast and the two mushrooms I picked are at this minute frying in the pan. Well at least Skipper enjoyed himself, both he and I have had a good walk, and unlike golf, mushrooming does not ruin a good walk. I am never disappointed if I return from mushrooming with only a couple of mushrooms or even nothing at all. Neither I am I disappointed when I return from fishing with only one or no fish. I am just so happy to be lucky enough to be living in a part of the world where these wonderful activities are possible.

Barbara has just bought me a shooting stick and I have just tried it out. No, don't be worrying, I am not about to take up shooting. It's just a very handy stick with a seat at one end of it, and a spike on the other.

I did once try my hand at shooting and it wasn't a great success. I went with a party of friends and I only fired one shot in to the sky. Just like the rest of our party on that day, I hit nothing, and we all returned to Castletown empty handed. As a kid I did once throw a boomerang though, and yes it actually came back, although it was a couple of days later and courtesy of a police officer. A family friend called George had made the boomerang for me after much pestering by me. I took my boomerang over the wall into Victoria Road School. I don't think I actually hit anyone, but somehow my boomerang ended up in the hands of one of the teachers who reported to the police that someone had thrown a boomerang in the schoolyard. I would have got away with it, except for the fact that my brother Kevin tried to get my boomerang back, he being the only person at the school that recognized the weapon. George Squires is now long dead. He was a truly wonderful man that made so many of my childhood dreams come true. He took me sailing in his boat, and made me small toy boats. I think in all his years, the only time the police ever had reason to talk to him was for making a wooden boomerang for a blind child. God bless George, he didn't know I actually intended to use it with hope it would come back to me. He probably just thought I wanted to know what one felt like.

August 8, 2008

My wife Barbara is terrified of flying and our Border Collie, Skipper, hates aeroplanes with a passion. Living very close to the airport means that Skipper has plenty of opportunity to vent his anger at the flying intruders to his space. Each plane is chased out of Poulson Park or from the meadow, and every time he returns from chasing a plane from the area, he counts it as another successful mission. He now regards himself as having a 100 % success rate at chasing aeroplanes from the park, the riverbank, or Langness. I am sure that the demise of the airline Euro Manx, as far as Skipper is concerned was down to his aggressive and extremely hostile attitude towards them! You can imagine what it must do for a dog's ego to have chased off an entire airline for good. FlyBee now seem very high up on his agenda. But generally, all aircraft are the enemy and must be kept at bay.

The blogs good friend and Milwaukee USA correspondent Elizabeth Wittmann has emailed me some very interesting dog information, which I have included at the end of this blog.

Today is the start of the Royal show. I hear on the news that there is to be a display of the dancing diggers. This is a group of people who manage to get their JCB'S to perform to music. I guess this is done by the drivers wearing

headphones and manipulating the diggers accordingly. I once drove a JCB digger, and yes dancing took place. However, on that occasion, it was the Tipperary County Council workers who were dancing out of my way as I filled in potholes on the Moneygal road in Tipperary. I had been staying with my uncle in his pub, and the previous night I had been talking to my mate Johnny who owned a JCB and did contract work for the local council. I had explained to Johnny how I was finding the days very long, so he suggested that I came out with him on his digger the following day. This, I was more than happy to do. It was Johnny's idea that I takeover the controls for a while. It wasn't difficult as the bucket was down and full of muck which Johnny was shoveling from the bucket and filling in the pot holes. All I had to do was ease the digger forward very slowly. I don't know why a couple of councilors turned up when they did, probably to inspect Johnny's work. Had Johnny not shouted up to me to switch off the engine and come down from the cab, the Tipperary Councilors would never have known that the driver of the digger was totally blind, and, we still might have pulled it off had Johnny not assisted me down from the cab. The councilors danced all right. I am sure that they were good clean living and God fearing folk, and that God will by now have forgiven them for their as far as I was concerned, totally unjustified outburst of expletives. Later over dinner back at Johnny's house, I felt really sorry for him as he tried to explain to his wife how it would be difficult to get the council contract back, but maybe not impossible. "Johnny" she said. "You haven't a hope of getting the contract back after allowing a blind man to drive your digger, however, hopefully we just might make enough money from the News of the World article that will surely now follow!" Well, it didn't or if it did, I didn't get to know about it. In fact I don't think the story even made the Tipperary Star. Mind you there is no place on earth as good as the Irish at keeping something quiet and out of the public domain when it suits. Still at least the story has made this blog.

Now for Elizabeth's contribution from Milwaukee.

These classifieds were really put in the paper - a smile for your day

FREE YORKSHIRE TERRIER. 8 years old. Hateful little mutt. Bites!
FREE PUPPIES: 1/2 Cocker Spaniel, 1/2 sneaky neighbor's dog.
FREE PUPPIES Mother, AKC German Shepherd. Father, Super Dog...able to leap tall fences in a single bound.
FOUND DIRTY WHITE DOG Looks like a rat. Been out a while. Better be a big reward.
COWS, CALVES: NEVER BRED. Also 1 gay bull for sale.
NORDIC TRACK $300 Hardly used, call Chubby.
GEORGIA PEACHES California grown - 89 cents/lb.
JOINING NUDIST COLONY! Must sell washer and dryer $300.
WEDDING DRESS FOR SALE Worn once by mistake. Call Stephanie.
And the best one:
FOR SALE BY OWNER: Complete set of Encyclopedia Britannica, 45 volumes. Excellent condition. $1,000 or best offer. No longer needed. Got married last month. Husband knows everything.

August 11, 2008

Today there is a fresh wind from the southwest. The forecast says the rain is going to continue and will become heavy again. I don't know about global warming, but I sure am learning a lot about global soaking.

Why have we got all the money and the third world have none? Why have we far too much water and the third world have none? I heard someone on the radio this morning on 'thought for the day' saying, "If you have food in your fridge, a roof over your head, and some money in the bank, then you are in the 8% of the world's richest people". In other words, there are 92 per cent of people in the world worse off than you are. So, if you have landed in to work this morning and have not stopped whinging since you got there, stop it now!

My old friend, Ray Cregeen, from Port St. Mary told me a little story at the gathering on Friday night. A gathering was taking place in the Albert hotel in Port St. Mary. The gathering was trying to resolve our Island's unbalanced, and what some folk would see as unfair, economic situation. A well-known fisherman who we shall call A.B. came up with a solution. A.B.'s solution was to gather all the money up from everyone on the Island and share it all out equally amongst everybody. "The problem with that A.B," said one of the people "is that in five years time, all the wealth would end up back in the hands of the same people once again." "Yes," replied A.B. "But then we would have another collection, and share it all out once again!" Well somehow I don't think our Government will be taking up A.B's idea, although should A.B. decide to stand in the next general election, I would think there would be a few votes for him out there.

Some folks seem to meet more than their fair share of trouble, and when they meet it, they seem to be pretty adept at dealing with it. Maybe that's because they have more practice in dealing with it than most of us. This morning as I walked through the park with Skipper, I met a lady with a Husky dog. As we headed towards the gate, that separates the park from the riverbank, and the fields where the cows graze, she told me how she had been chased by a heard of cows, twice. The first time was over in Port St. Mary, and had been knocked to the ground. On that occasion someone spotted her plight from the road and came to her rescue. She survived the ordeal with just a couple of bruised ribs. On the second occasion, she was chased whilst walking her dog through the meadow on the banks of the Silverburn. This time, the cows chased her into the river. She appears to have come through that ordeal pretty well unscathed as well. I wonder has she now learned her lesson regarding tramping through a field of cows with her dog? Well maybe, maybe not?

When I was younger I used to go out fishing sometimes in stormy seas, and I have lost count of how many times after a rough trip I told myself 'never again'. Yet I did return, time and time again. I am sure the friend I met this morning will not be as cavalier as I was, and at the end of the day, who has the last laugh? The lady I met this morning no doubt tucks in to her roast beef every Sunday, and I tuck in to my fish and chips every Friday. If I got a few bashings from rough seas, and my walking friend this morning gets roughed up a bit by the cows, it seems to me that we are still getting a better deal than the cows and the fish!

August 12, 2008

Once again I woke up to the sky just pouring down rain. I turned on the radio to listen to Manx Radio for the 7 a.m. news and to catch Eric Kelly with the 'Thought for the Day', which comes on just before the news. Today he said that half a million people in this world die each year because they have no fresh water. What is God playing at I have to ask myself! Why is He/She sending us more water than we can cope with, and none at all to others who desperately need it? For me, the situation just reinforces my belief, that we are just a tiny part of a huge empire that is way beyond our power of imagination, and even the greatest and largest religions of this world don't even come close to predicting our final

destiny, if indeed final is what it turns out to be.

Well now, back to the rain. As I write this, the rain is still falling from the skies in torrents. We used to have an airline here that recently went to the wall. Their departure and arrival record was so bad that it was suggested that their airport announcements should in future, only be made when they were actually taking off on time. I am thinking, because we are having so much rain at present, maybe in the future I should only pass comment when it is not raining. Let us hope that here on the Island we do not become so flooded that we need an ark to escape. We have now become so bogged down in health and safety, and general bureaucracy that surely Ramsey shipyard or whoever was tasked to build the ark, would never manage to comply with all our modern regulations. I have made just one or two slight alterations to this original ark-building project. I don't know the original author but whoever is was, well done!

In the year 2006, the Lord came unto Noah, who was now living in the Isle of Man as a tax exile and said,
"I see your Island has become wicked and over-populated, and I see the end of all flesh before me. Build another Ark and save 2 of every living thing, along with a few good humans."
He gave Noah the drawings, saying, "You have 6 months to build the Ark before I will start the unending rain for 40 days and 40 nights".
Six months later, the Lord looked down and saw Noah weeping in his yard - But no Ark.
"Noah!" He roared, "I'm about to start the rain! Where is the Ark?"
"Forgive me, Lord, "begged Noah," but things have changed. I needed Building Regulations Approval because the Ark was over 30m^2. I've been arguing with the Fire Brigade about the need for a sprinkler system.
My neighbours claim that I should have obtained planning permission prior to building the Ark in my garden because it is development of the site even though in my view it is a temporary structure, but the roof is too high. I had to appeal to Tony Brown for a decision.
The Local Area Access Group complained that my ramp was going to be too steep, and the inside of the Ark wasn't fully accessible, then the Department of Transport demanded a bond be posted for the future costs of moving power lines and other overhead obstructions, to clear the passage for the Ark's move to the sea.
I told them that the sea would be coming to us, but they would hear nothing of it.
Getting the wood was another problem. All the decent trees have Tree Preservation Orders on them and we live in a Site of Special Scientific Interest set up in order to protect a rare species of grasshopper. I tried to convince the environmentalists that I needed the wood to save the grasshoppers - but no go!
When I started gathering the animals, the MSPCA sued me. They insisted that I was confining wild animals against their will. They argued the accommodation was too restrictive, and it was cruel and inhumane to put so many animals in a confined space.
Then Malew commissioners, the DLGE and the Rivers Authority ruled that I couldn't build the Ark until they'd conducted an environmental impact study on your proposed flood.
I'm still trying to resolve a complaint with the Equal Opportunities Commission on how many ethnic minority people I'm supposed to hire for my building team.
The trades unions say I can't use my sons. They insist I have to hire only Corgi registered workers with Ark-building experience.
To make matters worse, the Customs and Excise seized all my assets, claiming I'm trying to leave the Island illegally with endangered species.
So, forgive me, Lord, but it would take at least 10 years for me to finish this Ark."
Suddenly the skies cleared, the sun began to shine, and a rainbow stretched across the sky. Noah looked up in wonder and asked, "Does this mean you're not going to destroy the Island after all?"
"No," said the Lord, "Tynwald has obviously already beaten me to it!"

August 13, 2008

Good morning folks, well it's a lovely bright sunny day. What a bitch! My medical people tell me I must avoid direct sunlight and apply 50 factor sun cream at all times. I have spent the last few days wittering on about the blessed rain and now I want it back again. I am between a rock and a hard place. I either go out and get soggy or stay in because it's too sunny. Life could be so much worse couldn't it? What if I couldn't get out of bed each morning until help arrived? At least I have a choice. So many folks don't have any choice at all. Yet they get on with life each day and put up with whatever comes their way. I will shut up now about the weather and try really hard to find something worth moaning about such as the slow response times of Manx.net, or Liverpool's failure to sign Gareth Barry!

I have been listening to the Olympic Games on the radio. I tend to feel sorrier for those who expect to win but end up losing, or at least not getting a medal. Some competitors are even disappointed because they only scooped a Bronze or Silver medal. Imagine being disappointed because you only have a Bronze or Silver medal. You become one of the very few people in the world to possess an Olympic medal and you are disappointed! I guess it all comes down to people's expectations in life. If your dream or goal is to become President or Prime Minister and you end up as the secretary of the local whist drive club, I guess you will end up disappointed. Pope Pius 12th said, "Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he will never be disappointed!" I guess the aspirations and goals of those taking part in the Olympics are simply much higher than ours. They are simply on a much higher level than most of us.

Anyway these Olympics started me thinking about my own goals in life. Of course they have changed as the years have gone by. At one time, I wanted to earn lots of money, and then just enjoy spending it on boats and having a good time with friends. I never did earn lots of money! However, I do now own a boat; she is not a luxury cabin cruiser, but none-the-less, she is a boat and more than serves her purpose. I did however make lots of friends, and hopefully still have many more to make. I guess I am round about Bronze medal position in life at present. If this is the way it remains, I shall not be disappointed. Well what use will a gold medal be ‘up there’ or ‘down below’, whatever the case maybe?

Something that has always puzzled me, are quotes from famous people. I mean, how do these quotes come about? Where are these people when they make these quotes, and why do they do so? Did Men like Mark Twain, George Bernard Shaw, Churchill, and women such as Queen Victoria and Margaret Thatcher think all these quotes up overnight or something? Or did the words just flow naturally from their lips whenever journalists asked them difficult questions.

Well the blog’s correspondent over on the West coast of the US in Washington State, Cheryl, has been working tirelessly on the blog's behalf digging out some of these quotes for us, which I am happy to include.

Sometimes, when I look at my children, I say to myself ~~'Lillian, you should have remained a virgin.' -- Lillian Carter, mother of Jimmy Carter, US President

I had a rose named after me and I was very flattered. But I was not pleased to read the description in the

catalog: 'No good in a bed, but fine against a wall.' -- Eleanor Roosevelt

Last week, I stated this woman was the ugliest woman I had ever seen. I have since been visited by her sister, and now wish to withdraw that statement .- Mark Twain

The secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending; and to have the two as close together as possible.- George Burns

Santa Claus has the right idea. Visit people only once a year. - Victor Borge

Be careful about reading health books. You may die of a misprint. - Mark Twain

By all means, marry. If you get a good wife, you'll become happy; if you get a bad one, you'll become a philosopher.—Socrates

I was married by a judge. I should have asked for a jury. - Groucho Marx

Only Irish coffee provides in a single glass all four essential food groups: alcohol, caffeine, sugar and fat. - Alex Levine

I don't feel old. I don't feel anything until noon. Then it's time for my nap.- Bob Hope

I never drink water because of the disgusting things that fish do in it.- W.C. Fields

We could certainly slow the aging process down if it had to work its way through Congress. - Will Rogers

Don't worry about avoiding temptation as you grow older, it will avoid you. - Winston Churchill

Maybe it's true that life begins at fifty . but everything else starts to wear out, fall out, or spread out. - Phyllis Diller

By the time a man is wise enough to watch his step; he's too old to go anywhere. - Billy Crystal

August 14, 2008

I have to make an appointment with a dentist later. I have never liked dentists, in fact I have always thought that if ‘push came to shove’, I could quite easily get by without teeth. Well at least the real ones, false teeth would suit me fine. If I can manage the last 50 years or so with a pair of false eyes, then a set of false teeth would be a doddle. Well, like I say, I have never been very fond of trips to the dentist but this time it will be a little different. After the events of the last 6 months or so, with chemotherapy and radiotherapy for cancer treatment, everything else seems so minor and not worth worrying about. It seems that having cancer has put everything else in my life in to prospective. If I don’t go and sort out my toothache, I will not die, and I could probably pull the tooth out myself. I can’t remove my lungs though, and even if I could, a pair of false lungs would be unlikely to serve me as well as my glass eyes have done. So, I am now in good shape as nothing I do or whatever might happen to me in the future could, be any worse than what has already happened to me. In truth I probably couldn’t be more wrong. If I were to lose someone close to me that would be far worse than having cancer, or having to face up to death myself. So, I guess no matter how bad things are, they can always be worse, though I am sure that by having a life threatening experience does indeed stand us in good stead for the rest of our lives.

A friend of mine, the late Captain Alan Smith, once told me about a difficult landing he had made while flying a Manx Airlines Viscount aeroplane from Liverpool to Ronaldsway. He landed the aircraft in a Force 9 or 10 storm. He had previously warned the passengers that the landing was going to be bumpy. On touch down, all the passengers clapped and cheered. When Alan was asked later about the landing, he replied, “It wasn’t that difficult a landing, after all there was no one shooting at me!” Alan had been an RAF fighter pilot during the war, and his bumpy flight from Liverpool on that day in the cockpit of the Manx Airlines Viscount must have felt like a doddle compared too many of his previous duels over the English Channel back in the 1940’s.

A couple of years ago, my father in law Joe, was staying with us on a short holiday. He was very keen to come out on a sailing trip with us. Unfortunately during that weekend the weather was not good. In the end we decided to take him for a quick trip around Castletown Bay. We knew it was going to be a bumpy ride to put it mildly but despite the fact that Joe was well in to his 80’s, he insisted on sitting in the stern of the boat out in the open. As we chugged our way around the bay the boat rocked and rolled like Elvis Presley. Spray was shipped over the open deck and poor old Joe got a bit of a soaking. When we returned to the harbour, I said to Joe. “Sorry it was so rough for you Joe, hopefully we will do better next time!” “Not at all,” said Joe. “I really enjoyed myself, the last time I was in a small boat was in 1943 after being torpedoed by a German U-boat in the Pacific Ocean. I spent over 40 days at sea that time, in an open lifeboat.” I discovered later that many men had died in the lifeboat and Joe, with the remaining few survivors were eventually picked up and landed in Australia. After a couple of weeks rest, they were promptly off to chance their arm all over again and I do believe that he was once more torpedoed and spent more time in a lifeboat. We walked up the harbour steps and sat outside the Gluepot Pub. Someone shouted, “a rough trip today Tom!” I said nothing. I’m sure though, the old man sat beside me must have thought to himself. “Well, if that’s a rough trip, I will settle for a life on the ocean wave any day of the week!”

I think I have now learned my lesson from these brave folks. A cold, a headache, or for that matter a bloody toothache means nothing to me now. Cancer has taught me how to put things in to perspective. Just as Captain Alan Smith’s war time experiences and my father in law Joe’s time spent in the lifeboats, taught them. In life sometimes we need to go to the brink in order to learn about perspective. It might be cancer or some other life threatening disease. You might become ship wrecked or survive an air crash or traffic accident. Whatever form it comes in, most of us at some point have to endure something pretty horrific, and as a result of it we learn how to put things into perspective.

This is Tom Glassey, on the banks of the Silverburn, just simply grateful to be here.

August 15, 2008

Yesterday Barbara had a dentist’s appointment in Ramsey. After a few bad experiences in Port Erin, Barbara returned to the dentist we had in Ramsey 12 years ago, Mr. Jones. She has been with him now for about 2 years. I have not been to

a dentist for over 5 years so I guess I don't have one at all at present. Anyway, we set off for the dentist and stopped off at the Point of Ayre to let Skipper have an hour or so bouncing about out there. I have been having a bit of trouble with toothache now for the last couple of months. It began whilst I was having radiotherapy in Clatterbridge. At the time, dealing with toothache and dentists were not very high on my agenda so I just bashed on with it. Well yesterday while out on the Ayres, the damn toothache really started in earnest. The pain was so bad it went up the side of my face and made my eyes water. It seemed a bit of a strange irony that my toothache should become so bad on a trip out to Barbara's dentist. On our arrival Barbara said that she would ask if I could go in her place, which I thought would be entirely out of the question. The wonderful Mr. Jones took me in Barbara's place and whipped out my aching tooth. Barbara did not mind as she didn't have toothache and now has another appointment. Mr. Jones as far as I am concerned, is Father Christmas; well he must be, as just like Santa, he didn't charge me a penny. Although he is a private dentist, he let me go as an NHS patient as a one off.

Talking of pennies, when I was a youngster I recall a public toilet in Castletown at the bottom of Peggy's Hill. The toilet is still there but back in those days it was a penny to gain access. You had to shove a penny into a slot in the door and it went down into some kind of mechanism that opened the door. My mate, Billy, reckoned that with the aid of a knife we could extract enough money from it to buy a couple of bottles of pop. It was a Sunday evening as I remember that my lesson into toilet robbery took place. Billy, after sliding the knife up and down the slot for about 10 minutes, gave up trying. It was now down to me. I placed a penny of my own in the slot so that I could try and gauge where the pennies were dropping in. I played about with my knife for about a half hour or so and got absolutely nothing. Never mind, help was about to arrive from a most unlikely source. Constable Tom Cregeen was a nice friendly sort of Copper, however, I was not expecting him to turn up at the scene of the crime and offer me assistance. He ambled into the loo and spotted me at the toilet door with my knife in slot, he took the knife from me, and prized one penny from the mechanism and handed it to me. "Did you put that penny there?" he asked. "Yes," I replied. Well this mechanism has not been working now for several weeks so yours would have been the only penny in it! The next time you take to robbing somewhere, just make sure there is something to rob before you break in!" I think myself and Billy got away with a caution, and of course our parents were informed of our sinful ways. Well, I suppose nobody ever fled the country on the proceeds of a public toilet.

This story reminds me of my dear old Uncle Sean. Someone once asked him if they could use the toilet in his pub. "Yes of course," he replied. When they returned from the loo, they decided to bring it to his attention, that the toilet had no lock on the door. "Is that right," said Uncle. "Well I have been in this pub now for 15 years, and in all that time, no-one ever stole a bucket of sh-t yet."

Well People that is it for another week. I shall be back on Monday bright and early. Until then, this is Tom Glassey, on the banks of the Silverburn River enjoying life on the proceeds of a misspent youth.

August 18, 2008

Its 9.55 and at present it is not raining, however, the forecast indicated that very soon, it will be pelting down. We are told to expect at least an inch of rain today. When I was a youngster, my elders always used to tell me to make sure I saved a few bob for a rainy day. Well I would have had to amassed a considerable fortune to see me through this lot.

When I worked at the bank, I got lots of advice on pension schemes and investment plans for when I grew older. Well we all know what happened to the pension schemes and now it's tricky trying to select a good investment plan. Twenty years ago I was also getting oodles of advice on the best mortgage plan. The island is awash with financial advisors, giving mostly conflicting advice; I think you might as well chuck all their names and schemes into a hat and just pull one out and go for it. I actually used to work in the bank and had access to mortgage, and financial advisors; if I found it difficult to select what was best for me, then Heaven only knows how some of the customers coped. At one point I simply found the whole investment lark so confusing, I just invested the few quid I had at that time into premium bonds and didn't regret it. Now I am quite a bit closer to retirement than I was back then. I can't say that I am worried about it, because just arriving there has now become my goal. Twenty years ago, retirement seemed a long way off, and now I will be simply grateful to reach it. What is much more likely to effect my retirement plans than my financial affairs is what George Bush might get up to, or Iran, Russia, Georgia, China and of course the UK. At least today it will only be rain that falls from the sky. If our so-called God-fearing politicians don't sort themselves out soon, it will be bombs that are falling.

Alistair Cook the brilliant BBC journalist once described the role of Britain and Argentina during the Falklands war, as two bald men fighting over a comb. What a shame that over 500 people had to die in order to determine the ownership of the comb.

Well now, back to retirement, and where else would you go to for good retirement advice than Port St. Mary? The story goes that two brothers who lived in the village, both grew to a ripe old age. One of the brothers was diligent all his life, and spent his money wisely. He saved accordingly, and had plenty of money put away to meet the costs of old age. The other brother blew all his money in the pub, saved nothing and sailed through life having a wonderful time. When the rich brother grew old, he moved into a retirement home. He had his own room, was fed well, and was well looked after. The cost was high, but he had saved enough to more than meet the costs of the home. One day a new resident was admitted to the home. He had no money and his costs would have to be met by the state. The following morning, the rich brother woke up to find his wayward brother lying in a bed on the other side of the room. "How the heck did you end up here!" he gasped. "Sorry to disappoint you," said the wayward brother, "but tell me this! Does my presence here make you any worse off?"

We all travel along different roads in life, but yet it is possible that we will end up in the same place.

August 19, 2008

Grocer Jack was one of the few people not to be upset by the supermarket that had just set-up on the outskirts of the village. On the opening day he took a gander over to check it out. On spotting a large sign at the entrance to the super market, which was advertising, "Bacon, two shillings a pound." He immediately turned about and headed back to his shop. He wasted no time in putting up a sign advertising, "Bacon, one and sixpence a pound." The next day the supermarket changed its sign to read, "Bacon, one shilling a pound." Jack like-wise changed the sign above his shop to read, "Bacon, sixpence a pound." The following day the manager of the supermarket came out to visit Jack. "Jack," he began, "We have to do something about this bacon price war, if we carry on like this, soon we will both be out of business!" "Well, maybe you will," said Jack. "But not me. I don't sell bacon!!!"

I heard this story from that wonderful old farmer, Harvey Briggs from Ochan, many years ago. Life is full of David and Goliath stories and I guess it's heartening to know that the mighty can, and sometimes do, fall.

August 20, 2008

Like everyone else on the Island, I am disappointed that our young cyclist Mark Cavendish, did not win a medal this morning. Never mind, he is a young fella and his time will come again, of that I am certain.

It reminded me of my own cycling triumphs many years ago. I was never going to win an Olympic gold medal, or any other medal for that matter. At the blind school in Liverpool we had bicycles to play with. Yes, we were able to take a bike and ride around the playground on them. The bikes, as I recall, all had bells, but I can't really think why that would be. Not much point in having a bell to ring if you can't see who is in your way. We often crashed into each other, sometimes into teachers, and every now and then, a nun would bite the dust. Eventually, a benefactor donated a couple of tandems to the school. The kids with a small amount of sight would ride at the front and the totally blind kid on the back. Of course we were strictly forbidden to take the tandem outside the school playground. One night, my mate Charlie, who had a small amount of sight, and myself, decided to take the tandem outside the school and have a quick spin through the streets of Liverpool. We were doing fine until we came to our first set of cross roads. I suppose we did well just to stop at the halt sign in the first place. However, once we had lost our momentum, it became a little tricky getting going again. A couple of Scouse kids came to our rescue though. They offered to hold onto the bike until we got going again. As they staggered along beside the tandem they asked where we were heading. "Back to the blind school" I said. "Yikes," said the Scousers, "The f---in' blind school!" Well even hardened street-wise kids in Liverpool were a little taken back by coming across a couple of blind kids riding a tandem through the streets. I must say, the nuns did not use such colourful language on our return, even though they were probably more shocked than the Scouse kids. I think on reflection, two weeks grounded, and no pocket money for same period was a trifle harsh.

The nuns were not even impressed by the fact that we had borrowed a small statue of St. Christopher, the patron saint of travel, from the front hall and dangled him from the front of the tandem to ensure our safe return.

Back home on the Island, during the school holidays, I would often be seen cycling through the streets of Castletown. A blind kid cycling through Castletown, often with Dad running alongside the bike, didn't have quite the same impact on the Castlwtown folk, as blind kids riding through Liverpool had on the Scousers. In fact, they almost expected it from me in Castletown. I would often ride home after having just finished a night shift at the Gasworks at 6 in the morning, Dad running along on the pavement and me on the bike in the gutter. I loved riding the bike when I was a kid.

I know that Mark Cavendish will be bitterly disappointed today, having not won a medal in the Olympics. However, if his bike ends up giving him as much pleasure in life as mine did, eventually he will not miss his medal. When Dad and I rode up the main road and in through the gates of the Janet's Corner housing estate at 6 a.m., there was no Olympic euphoria, or cheering spectators, just a tap on the horn of an early morning worker. However, my bike ride from the Gasworks to our house was as thrilling to me as any Olympian might get from riding round the Velodrome. No bronze or silver medals, but the joy and happiness I got was, and still is, worth more than the bike's weight in gold.

August 25, 2008

Good morning people. Firstly I am sorry for going AWOL for the last few days. I was not too good on Thursday and Friday so I'm afraid the blog just didn't happen. I have been wondering for some time now about toning the blog down from a daily rant to a weekly one. I guess everything runs its course, and it seems to me that maybe it is now time to press the keys once a week. I will stumble on a daily basis for the next week or so and after that, who knows.

Well, we had a pleasant little surprise on Saturday night. We returned home from walking Skipper, to find a lady at our front door. She told us her name was Dorothy and that she and her husband, Charlie, were over here from Liverpool for the races. She had discovered the blog whilst searching for something on the Internet in her hotel room. She said she ended up reading the whole thing in a day. Now she was standing at our front door wanting to know why it had come to a sudden end. It turned out that Dorothy's husband is Charlie Lambert, the TV football commentator and also the TT and Manx Grand Prix race commentator. It was nice to meet and chat to them both and I hope the weather improves for them this week. Well, you just don't know who the heck is out there reading your blog do you, although it would appear you sometimes have to stop writing in order to find out!

Well the Olympics are now all but over. Over the last couple of weeks I have really enjoyed listening to the Olympics on the radio. It has also struck me, the contempt some of the competitors have shown for winning a bronze medal. One guy simply threw his to one side and others I have heard interviewed have sounded so disappointed with silver or bronze. Many of course have been over the moon to receive a bronze and some are simply overjoyed just to have taken part. I once won a crunchy for coming in third place in the sack race at school. I can't remember whether I held the crunchy in contempt or not. I am pretty sure I didn't throw it away though. Just think; it is extremely unlikely that you will go through life and meet someone who has won a bronze medal in the Olympics and yet here are these men and women showing such disappointment at their rare prize. Come to think of it though, I haven't yet met anyone who has won a crunchy for finishing third in the school sack race. I note that the sack race has not appeared in the Olympics yet, but surely it is only a question of time. There seems to be some pretty weird sports and pastimes in there already.

Yesterday was the annual World Tin Bath championships in Castletown Harbour. Now I note that tin bath racing is not yet an Olympic sport. Well why not? Britain has done really well in the rowing, canoeing, and sailing events. So, I'm certain the Isle of Man would have gained a gold medal had there been a tin bath event. I am sure that the Castletown Ale Drinkers would have conducted themselves extremely well in China. Many folks believe that the rowing and sailing folks are just a tad snooty. Well, a tin bath event would have evened that off. I believe that Jed Clayton as the team manager and Dave Collister as team coordinator, would have brought the bacon home and the IOM would be top dog, not only in cycling, but in tin bath racing as well. In fact, if tin bath racing was to be introduced in to the Olympics, they could also introduce a new medal at the same time. What about a tin medal! They could give the tin medal to all those who finish 4th, apart from the tin bath event which of course the tin medal would be awarded to the first place. Now just think how many more medals Britain would have won if there had been a tin medal awarded at these games for finishing 4th. Well maybe if I write to Seb Coe, he might get this thing sorted by 2012 for the London Olympics.

In the meantime, Jed Clayton and his gang of lager drinking ale drinkers have already won or achieved far greater things than Olympic gold medals. For years now, they have organized events and raised thousand and thousands of pounds for charities within the town. Olympic medals have been won by people who have not had to work as hard or be as dedicated as the CADS have shown to be. I am sure that if the CADS were a political party, all their members would now

be OBE'S, Dames and Knights.

Well people, that is about it for today. I hope to blog again each day this week. However, the blogs are simply taking me so long to type these days that time will probably not always permit. I just don't find the keys on the keyboard as quickly as I used to, which I think is all part of the side effects of this radiation lark that I had on my head. I am sure it will return to normal again one day.

August 26, 2008

I have just enjoyed a poached egg on toast for breakfast. I am glad Barbara was not watching any celebrity chef programmes last night on the TV; otherwise I probably would not have enjoyed my breakfast. In my opinion, celebrity chefs are probably very good at preparing gourmet food. However, I don't think they have the faintest idea how to cook basic stuff. A few weeks ago, I woke up to a bacon butty for breakfast. Unfortunately one of these celebrity chefs had been on the telly the night before, demonstrating the best way to make a bacon butty. According to him, you cook the bacon in a microwave oven for two minutes. I ask you, how ridiculous! Unfortunately, I ended up one of his victims, and I didn't even watch his programme. Everyone knows that the only way to make a proper bacon butty, is to fry the bacon in a pan of fat. Then thickly butter two slabs of thick sliced bread, and wedge the bacon in the middle. You can dip the bread in the fat for extra flavour if required. This celebrity chef also went on to demonstrate how to make, what in his opinion was the best fish and chips. Thank goodness Barbara came to her senses and didn't attempt to serve up anymore of his rubbish. My idea of good fish and chips is to dump a big lump of cod into batter made from flour, water, and egg white. Then fry the fish and chips in a big pan of drippin'. Fantastic! Celeb chef will probably insist that the fish has to be caught off some exotic island in the southern ocean. The chips will probably have to be made from some very rare breed of spud, which can only be obtained from Harrords, and as for the peas, well I simply don't think you would ever get the concept of mushy peas in to a celeb chef's head.

A friend of mine in South Australia emailed me a few weeks ago to tell me that Gordon Ramsey and Jeremy Clarkson were appearing on TV over there, cooking a meal on the Isle of Man. Blimey we are really scraping the bottom of the barrel when we are now relying on a foul mouthed cook and a spoiled boy racer to promote the IOM.
One of my best mates was a chef. Can you believe that? Well it's true, Ralph Alibone. Some of you might remember him from the Park restaurant in Onchan, or when he was at the Golf Links Hotel in Castletown. Ralph was a brilliant guy even though he was an Arsenal supporter. We used to nip out to the Golf Links Hotel for a pint on Sunday lunchtimes, and one of us would keep Ralph talking while the other nipped in to the kitchen and stole his cheese straws from the oven. I cannot be sure whether this blog can be accessed up in Heaven. If it can then Ralph, it really wasn't me mate that removed your eggs from the centre of your Scotch eggs, and replaced them with golf balls. These were the Scotch eggs you used to bring to the Union Pub for snacks. I know you thought it was me, but the truth is, it was Tony Mincher and he is now up there with you so I hope he has admitted it by now!

Well folks that is about it for today. It's nice to be back with you once again after my short break. Until tomorrow then, this is Tom Glassey, on the banks of the Silverburn, just enjoying life.

August 27, 2008

A German doctor while based in England became very disillusioned with the British class system. It annoyed him so much, that on one occasion he uncoupled the first class carriages from the rear of a train in Crew station. The train pulled away leaving the first class passengers sitting on an engineless train in Crew station for several hours, whilst the second class passengers rattled on towards their destination, probably oblivious to what the doctor had done.

When I was a kid traveling back to school on the IOM boat in the 60's, they use to have a rope pulled tight across the deck. This rope was to separate the first and second-class passengers. From what I can remember, it simply meant that on one side of the rope you paid a shilling for a cup of tea, and on the other you paid one and three a cup, and for the privilege of paying the extra amount for your tea, you paid an extra quid on top of your fare; however, you were at least a first class passenger. I recall one day Dad and myself ending up in the first class passenger saloon. On this occasion, for whatever reason, the rope was not in place. I never gave it much thought at the time, however, I wonder now if the German doctor was traveling on that day and had untied it. I suppose an eccentric German doctor charging round untying ropes onboard a ship could be a bit dodgy.

Not so very long ago pubs use to have a best room and a bar. In the best room you paid a penny more for your pint for which you had a carpet under your feet, and a more comfortable chair to sit in. These days you pay around £3 for your pint, and it doesn't make any difference whatsoever as to where in the pub you choose to drink it. Mahatma Gandy always insisted on traveling third class on the Indian railways. He said it kept him in touch with the people. Can you imagine Gordon Brown traveling around Europe with RyanAir, or for that matter Tony Brown catching the bus in to Tynwald?

During my time at the bank, I was a very junior member of staff. I never did become a big cheese; however, I often did get to eat it. Once the telephone team was moved they didn't really know what to do with me, so they gave me a nice little office up on the top floor. It was a lovely little office with a couple of computers and a telephone. The telephone never rang once and I don't think I ever turned on the computers. Anyway I got bored just hanging around smoking my pipe and what have you so I invented a job delivering the post. Because I was based upstairs, I got to know when all the big functions were taking place in the boardroom. The food these high palloys ate in there was unbelievable. It is little wonder that the banks are now having a hard time. I had an inside man which we will call Bernard. If he reads these blogs he will recognize himself. Bernard, who was a special policeman, would go and raid the fridge of the finest cheeses and bring them to my office. Boy, they were wonderful! Maybe the top brass in the bank thought if they put a special policeman in charge of their kitchen it would be a prudent move on their account. I am glad they were naive and extremely grateful to Bernard.

I do recall one day half a planeload of lawyers turned up at the bank one morning, and were to be wined and dined by management. They all sat in the main banking hall before being shown to the boardroom. I was not expecting a bunch of lawyers to be sitting all over the banking hall and of course I fell over them when I came tramping along with my early morning post bag. Later as I sat in my 4th floor office I could hear a lot of tut tutting going on in the boardroom next door. It turned out that either the outside caterers had not turned up or maybe someone had phoned them and cancelled, as I'm sure I heard a German accent as they all trooped off down the stairs.

Until tomorrow then folks, Auf Wiedersehen!

August 28, 2008

Tom has asked me to let you all know that he is under the weather at the moment and not able to do his blog. He hasn't been well for over a week and has been feeling very nauseous. This week it got worse and a visit to the doctor didn't really throw any light on the cause, but he has now got anti sickness tablets, which have eased the symptoms. I'm now happy to say we appear to have discovered the cause of the sickness, vertigo. If Tom moves his head quickly or doesn't walk slowly, he is very dizzy. I confined him to his bed yesterday and so far this morning he is feeling much better. He is chomping at the bit to get up and try a walk with Skipper, but he has an appointment with the Oncologist this afternoon, so I have just informed him that he is staying put for now and his first walk will be to get to the hospital and if all goes well, he can walk Skipper tomorrow.

I will keep you all informed.

This is Barbara Glassey on the banks of the Silverburn River, keeping an eye on an impatient husband.

August 29, 2008

Well this is just a very short blog whilst Barbara has nipped out with Skipper. I saw the consultant yesterday and he is sending me for a head scan. I'm not keen on a head scan but I guess I will just have to go along with whatever they say for now. Sadly there will not be a gathering tonight but hopefully we will have one tomorrow night. The consultant said that after my scan he might have to put me on steroids. He has a weird accent and I thought he said he was going to give me a load of stair rods. I could not imagine why he felt I had the need for a box of stair rods. Well folks, sorry this is so short but I have to be sort of nippy this morning. I am pretty sure I will be back to normal tomorrow.

This is Tom Glassey, sitting tight on the banks of the Silverburn River.

September 1, 2008

So, here we are on September 1st. Another summer is drawing to an end. Some of you will say, "What summer?" Ok, the weather might not have been as good as we might have wanted it to be, none-the-less, another TT has past, another tin bath event has gone by, two agricultural shows, the Southern 100 and the Manx Grand Prix, to mention but a few. All these events are hallmarks of our summer. Strange though isn't it? When we wake up on Christmas morning and the sun is shining, and there is no snow or frost, we don't end up saying, "What Christmas?" My summer has more or less petered away. I spent the whole of mid summer over on the Wirral being treated for my lung cancer. Of course I am so grateful for all that was done for me at Clatterbridge. I spent the rest of the summer trying to cope and deal with the side effects of radiation. I hope that I am now through the worst of that.

Well, now that I am pulling through and hopefully on the mend, my boat, *Silverburn* has decided to call in sick. Her gearbox has gone and I am told it might cost around £600 to replace it, but that's the thing with boats, or anything else for that matter. They get sick, like a clutch in the car goes on the blink or whatever and we just fix it and pay the bill. It's a shame we can't just do that for humans. A new gearbox is just what I need right now and I would gladly pay £600 if I could just go back to being able to walk 5 or 6 miles a day again. However, I don't wish for such things, as I am just so grateful to be still here and be fitter, much fitter than I ever expected to be. This summer writing the blog has been a huge tonic for me.

Yesterday, I spent a very pleasant hour with Dorothy and Charlie Lambert from Merseyside. I would not have met these lovely people had it not been for my blog. Tomorrow I will spend a very pleasant couple of hours with Wendy and Sean from London. I would never have met them if it had not been for this blog and I would never have written a blog had I not managed to end up with lung cancer. So yes it's true, it's an ill wind that blows no good, and it takes a lot more than the weather to spoil or make your summer.

Until tomorrow then folks this is Tom Glassey on the banks of the Silverburn searching in vane for a secondhand gearbox.

September 5, 2008

Good morning people. Sorry for going AWOL for a whole week. I don't want to become a whinge, so I will just briefly explain that I have not been feeling too good for this last two weeks or so. It is purely the side effects of radiation. When it's bad I simply don't have the energy to do anything. All I want to do is sleep and that isn't good for you. Well now I shan't crackle on about being ill anymore.

Barbara has bought me a very expensive birthday present, a Bose digital radio. Well it's a state of the art radio. My only problem is that I have a daily battle trying to sort out the best position for the aerial. If anyone knows anything about how to set up a dab aerial please get in touch. Well anyway, there we go I am the proud owner of a Bose DAB radio. This radio gives me the most fantastic reception, when of course I can get the aerial positioned correctly.

I remember some 45 years ago getting a wireless (radio for the young ones) from my dad for my birthday. He turned up with the wireless at about 9 o'clock in the evening, about an hour before he was to start his night shift at the gasworks. It was a large wooden box that had to be plugged in. It took about 5 minutes to warm up, and I think he ended up being late for his shift, as I would not let him go until he had found Radio Luxembourg. Radio Luxembourg hissed, crackled and faded in and out. Nonetheless many others and I thought it was wonderful. My, oh my, how radios have improved since then! I also received another fantastic present this week. Sean and Wendy who are regular blog readers from London were on the Island last week. They came out to visit me just before they flew back to London and Sean (who is extremely busy in London) found time to actually make me a wooden chart of Castletown Bay. It is out of this world. It is so detailed and includes every rock at different levels; even the bell buoy in the bay and a marker for our house on the Silverburn, just past Alexander Bridge. It must have taken him bloody ages to include such detail. I really am extremely grateful to him.

Well people that is just about it for today. I can't say at this stage when I shall be blogging again, but hopefully it will be sooner rather than later.

In the meantime, take good care. This is Tom Glassey on the banks of the Silverburn River.

September 8, 2008

I have woken up today feeling good for the first time in over two weeks. It's as if I have been given a reprieve for my birthday. I have let so many birthdays slip by in the past unnoticed. However, if there is such a thing as a special birthday, then I suppose this is one. Today I am 55. I was not supposed so see this birthday. On this day last year I woke up, got dressed and reached for my pipe. Of course I did not know what lay ahead. By October I had packed in smoking, and by November I was struggling to walk on the beach. December was a long struggle with pneumonia and by January lung cancer had been diagnosed and I had not been given very long to live. February was the start of chemotherapy and on April 1st my Dad died. May saw the end of my chemotherapy and by June I was over in Clatterbridge having radiotherapy. July saw me back in my own home again and now all I have to do is cope with a few side effects. All in all, I am in much better shape on this 55th birthday than I was last year, although I didn't know it at the time. Of course I don't know what lies ahead in the coming year. Maybe the cancer will return, maybe I will win the lottery. Maybe and hopefully, nothing dramatic will happen. If I can get through another year waking every morning to the sound of the birds and in the winter, the rain beating on my window, followed in the spring with the sound of the dawn chorus, then I will indeed have won the lottery. You know folks; some things in life are just meant to happen. The explanations are far to deep for me to examine.

Let me close by relating something that happened to me yesterday. I was sitting on my sofa listening to the wireless. The next thing I know, I hear a voice in the doorway, a voice I would recognize anywhere. Two seconds later, my old friend Captain Jack Ronan is sitting in my living room. I haven't seen Jack for quite some time; however he chose to arrive on September 7th. 45 years ago he would have been taking me back to school in Liverpoool on his ship. Isn't it strange that out of all the days he should choose to pay me a visit, he chooses the date I would be going back to school?

This morning I have been out to Fort Island with Barbara and Skipper for a walk. In an hour or so, I shall head over to Port Erin. The Boss has given me a reprieve from my side effects for the day and I am extremely grateful. I shall sail now into another year, and no matter what troubles I encounter I shall fight for life because family, friends and just life itself are far too precious to let go of.

This is Tom Glassey, happy and content on the banks of the Silverburn River.

September 10, 2008

I am told that extremely heavy rain is coming our way from Northern Ireland and it should be with us in about an hour or so. Waiting for heavy rain is a bit like waiting for a bus that is going somewhere you don’t want to go to, like hospital or work. Talking of busses, back in the days of the old route master bus, where you got on at the back and paid the conductor, there used to be a conductor from Port Erin called Frankie Clucas. I recall an incident one day whereby about four of us boarded the Douglas bus in Castletown square. To avoid paying we hid under the stairs, my brother ‘Odd Job’, me and I can’t remember who else. Anyway when the bus reached Ballasalla we all ran out from under the stairs and legged it without paying. Frankie gave chase and my brother Odd Job decided to take matters in to his own hands. Seeing Frankie fully occupied trying to get his money from the rest of us, Odd Job legged it back to the bus, jumped on, rang the bell, and promptly jumped off again. Frankie was not best pleased as he stood there clutching his ticket machine whilst watching his bus careering down the road to Douglas without him. If you are still alive Frankie, I am sorry, and I am sure I speak on behalf of my late brother and our mates. What a shame I can’t ring a bell when the rain comes and send it on its way to England.

It’s amazing what you can do with sound if you close your eyes. No, this has got nothing whatsoever to do with busses and rain; I’m just off on one. Today would have been my first day back at school in Liverpool when I was young. Sometimes I would go and sit at the far end of the playground on a wooden bench. On a windy day, the wind would be blowing through the trees at the edge of the school playing field. I used to imagine the sound of the wind blowing through the leaves was the sound of the waves braking on Castletown beach. The sound of the water filters in the school swimming baths could easily be turned in to the generators of the IOM boat alongside the landing stage at the Pier head. At night time the highly polished floors of the convents dormitories became the timber deck of the IOM boats and the faint hiss of the washroom water system coming from next door just made it a little more authentic. Try as I might, there was just no way I could imagine the nuns scurrying about the place as being the crew. No wonder I was always homesick, I was forever pretending bits of the convent were home or at least the boat. Mind you, now that I think on it, I was just as bad at home.

I loved the coal boats. The coal boats tied up alongside the quay in Castletown, however, unlike the IOM passenger boats; they did not have gangways for boarding. You simply jumped from the quay down into the boat. Dad had an old Ford Thames van with a soft roof. I had decided that this van would make a wonderful coal boat. So, off came the soft roof and this meant that I could now climb up onto the garage roof and jump down into the van, which was now a coal boat of course. Dad was not best pleased when he came home, but his temper never lasted very long. In fact he fixed a ladder from the garage roof into the van and informed me that the van was now an IOM boat with a gangway.

Until the next time then people, this is Tom Glassey on the banks of the Silverburn, or possibly the Mississippi!

September 11, 2008

Well yesterday I began the day feeling really good. I managed a walk in the morning and again in the evening. I began to go down hill fast just after dinner and had to retire to bed. I was so looking forward to listening to the England match last night with my radio turned on and relaxed in my bed. When I next focused, England had won 4-1 and 5-Live was crackling on about the big bang theory.

I once was actually present when a big bang took place. My two brothers and I were at home and we would have been about 6 years old. An Irishman had called at the house though I can’t remember why. Anyhow mother could not get rid of him and he had managed to reduce us kids to tears. All of a sudden Dad turned up and mother explained that this guy simply wouldn’t leave and he’s got the kids crying. I remember the guy shouting “I am a former professional boxer so you better be careful,” as Dad picked him up. The next thing we knew, our boxer chap was flying through the front door, and as he sailed through the air, Billy Kennaugh, the baker from Winkles was coming up the garden path with a tray of bread and cakes. Our Irish friend sent the bread and cakes flying all over the pavement and poor old Billy lay in a crumpled heap on the garden path. As far as I know, our Irish boxer friend is still running and the good folk of King Williams Way feasted on free fresh bread and cakes for the next couple of days. I bet when this bunch of scientists have finished larking about in Switzerland, the locals don’t end up feasting on bread and cakes. That was the big bang on the Janet’s Corner housing estate back in about 1959.

September 12, 2008

Today is not a good day for travelers. An airline, XL, has gone bust leaving over 100,000 people stranded around the world. A fire on a train in the channel tunnel has shut down the tunnel for the foreseeable future. Thousands of people have lost their holiday in the sun and won't get their money back. If I was to go around Castletown selling vacuums, taking people's money, and then not turning up with the vacuums, I would now be sampling the delights of Jurby Jail, so why are these directors allowed to sell a product they haven't got, and even continue to flog that product after the company has gone burst? They should be slung into jail and the key thrown away.

This kind of thing could never happen to us when we were young. We simply didn't go on foreign holidays. Holidays were days out rather than two weeks in the sun. There was nothing to go to the wall, apart from the local charabanc company. At school in Liverpool we were all taken to New Brighton Fun Fair for one day a year. This was a day out to remember and we looked forward to it all year round. Volunteers from Liverpool turned up at the school in their own cars and drove around 100 blind kids to New Brighton. Police outriders would accompany the cars. The entire fairground was given over to the school for the day, every ride was free and the staff at the fairground gave their time up free as well. I can still hear Millie singing "My Boy Lollypop" as we clung on tight to the waltzer. Later we were all treated to fish and chips in the New Brighton hotel and every child was given a carrier bag containing sticks of New Brighton rock, fruit, sweets and small toys. After tea we were all taken off to the indoor fairground and offered exactly the same hospitality there. Then the team of volunteer drivers would take us all back to the boarding school. Normally, once our lights went out at 9o'clock we were not allowed to talk at all, however, on this one day of the year, the nuns overlooked the rules and we all chatted about ghost trains, dodgem cars and big dippers, deep in to the night. It was exactly the same thing at home. A day out at the White City was a very acceptable holiday. Of course our expectations back then were not as high as they are today. None-the-less, I don't ever recall having a miserable summer. But then, that's nostalgia for you.

I hear on the news that the poor old Steam Packet is not happy once again. It seems one of the energy companies are going to build a wind farm, which will be situated directly on the Ben My Chree's route to Heysham. This will mean the Ben will have to go round the wind farm therefore increasing the distance between Douglas and Heysham. This of course will also mean the journey time will be longer and I guess, up will go the fares. Now I don't know very much about wind farms. All I know is if you stand down wind of Frankie Goldsmith on Port St. Mary high street on a bad day, it is not a very pleasant experience. Should you bump into Frankie on the high street, I would cross over the road if I were you, and leave this human volcano to erupt in peace as he wends his way to the Albert.

September 15, 2008

Well I must say it was nice to see Liverpool wallop the MANCS yesterday, I guess their parachute payment at the end of the season will come in handy to tempt Bobby Charlton out of retirement. It is strange how the rivalry in Liverpool, between Liverpool and Everton, has now swung to the Liverpool United match. It is a shame though that what used to be good old rivalry has now turned to hatred amongst a few.

When I was at the blind school in Liverpool, every year we played Henshaw's Blind School from Manchester at crab football. This game was played in a gym. You scooted round in the crab position with your hands behind your back on the floor. The crab football was two huge waste paper baskets, filled with polish tins and then joined together and covered in canvas. We played several of the local sighted schools in Liverpool, Yewtree Comp, Blackmore Drive, Halt Comp and Cardinal Allen Grammar School. We always beat these schools as they didn't know how to play the game and were for the most part bloody terrified of the ball. Once a year though, St. Vincent's School for the Blind in Liverpool would meet Henshaw's Blind School from Manchester. This was not just a grudge match, it was filled with vile and hatred. There were only 6 of us in the crab football team, and if we returned to Liverpool having been beaten by Henshaw's, life would not be worth living for the following year. For a start we were Catholics and they were pagans. Well at least prods. Tension would start to mount several weeks before the match took place. Two blind schools that hated each other's guts. Actually I was the only blind kid on both sides. The rest were what we used to call 'partly sighted'. I remember lining up for one match in Manchester. There was a deadly silence just before the match commenced. Their striker called me a Catholic rat. I responded, "You're nothing but a proddy dog!" Someone else fired another insult and then someone threw a punch. Next we were all in there, smacking the hell out of each other. Who needs a ball? Teachers waded in from both sides. My dad received the bill for my teacher's glasses, which I smashed. Order was eventually restored but the teachers from both sides decided that enough was enough and we were hauled away and sent back to Liverpool in disgrace. The 6 members of the team were publicly ridiculed the following morning in assembly, having brought shame on the school. However, in the playground we were nothing but heroes. Other kids would come up to me asking whom did I belt and who won the fight. Looking back now, I think I would have found it absolutely hilarious watching 12 blind kids swinging punches, even if you belted one or two of your own players.

I woke up this morning at 5.15. My favourite part of any day is the point at which I wake up. To wake up at 5.15 or 6 or whatever the case maybe is just such a fantastic feeling. It doesn't matter what the weather is like, you simply go and make your mug of tea, turn on the wireless and relax. You are now at the very start of a brand new day. The whole day lies ahead of you. I am grateful and lucky to have woken at all. Everything was so peaceful and it seems there is only you awake. Even the rain this morning pelting down on our bedroom window did nothing to dampen my enthusiasm for this brand new day stretching out before me.

I hear on the news that yet another bank has gone to the wall. There are predictions of doom and gloom all over the place. But guess what, we will get over it, we always do. Just think of all the terrible things that have already happened to you. People you love that are sick, loved ones that have died, job losses and marriage breakups. All these things you have coped with, so who gives a stuff about a few banks and airlines going to the wall.

Of course our investments are up the creek, but everyone is in the same boat. So, we will all go to Blackpool for our hols and have fishfingers for tea on Friday night for a treat.

September 17, 2008

I was really saddened yesterday when my wife Barbara read in The Examiner that my old friend Francie Hughes had died. Francie came here from County Armagh and lived in Ramsey for many years. He was a leading member of the folk group, The Mannin Folk. Francie was a larger than life character, full of fun and always with a song on the end of his tongue. Occasionally he would come back to our house when we lived in Ramsey. With a bottle of porter between us, Francie would entertain us by playing the trumpet, tin whistle, strum his banjo and sing his head off, not all at once of course. I recall one winter driving up to Dublin from Tipperary. We arrived at the ferry port about midnight. It was

freezing cold and we were covered in mud after letting our dogs off in the Curragh on the way. I stood in the ferry port passenger terminal waiting to board the IOM boat, when from the back of the hall a banjo struck up and that wonderful gravelly Irish lilt of a voice struck up with Donegal Danny. It could only be Francie. Like me, Francie became a cancer sufferer. Well my old friend, I can't sing like you, I can't play the banjo like you; however, each Friday night at the gathering we shall render a few verses of Donegal Danny. I shall miss you, me old mucker, and I will never forget you!

September 18, 2008

Sometimes the most innocent questions or small requests can lead to the most unimaginable circumstances. Many years ago, a friend of mine asked me if I fancied a teatime pint. "Yes, no problem" I answered. An hour later we are both stood in the pub and my friend got a message to join the Peveril (a Steam Packet cargo ship) in Douglas and sail for Liverpool. "Do you fancy a trip?" he asked. The next thing I know, I was on my way to Liverpool. After spending all day discharging in Coburg Dock, we sailed again for the Island on the Saturday evening. I arrived home on Sunday morning. When I left the house at teatime on Friday, I was only going for a pint a two in the local with a friend!

I am reminded of the story of a guy who once walked in to the Duck's Nest in Castletown. He drew up a bar stool and ordered a pint. After a short while he pulled out his cigarettes and asked the local sitting beside him for a light. "No chance", said the local. "Why not?" asked our visitor friend. "Well," replied the local, "It's like this. If I give you a light, the next thing is you will offer me one of your fags. Then you might buy me a pint, then I would have to buy you one back, then you would buy me another, and so on and so on. Then it will be closing time and you will have missed the last bus to Douglas, so I will have to give you a lift. The trouble is, I won't be able to give you a lift because I will have had too much to drink, so you will have to come home with me and stay in my house for the night. We only have two bedrooms in our house. There is the wife and me in one, and my 16 year old daughter in the other, so you would have to sleep with her. If you did that you would probably get her pregnant! But that is not going to happen!" "Why not?" asked the visitor. "Because, I am not going to give you a light!" replied the local.

September 19, 2008

Well I have calmed down a little now from when I turned on my radio this morning. The first thing that annoyed me was the announcement of the mansion house dinner tonight. Yes, it seems there is to be a dinner for 200 guests tonight sponsored by the IOM Government. Apart from a few top wigs in our Government, the movers and shakers from the finance sector will all be present. This includes bankers and what have you from the UK. According to our lot, this piece of nonsense is going to bring bundles of money into the Island. Well unless you have been on planet Mars for the last year or so, we all know what the movers and shakers in the banking world have brought about. I would very much like to see the cost of this dinner published. After all, we are paying for it; this should include all other expenses such as airfares and hotel costs. Later the so-called financial benefits that this lavish lunch is going to bring to us all should also be published. The treasury should not be allowed to get away with glibly announcing that a dinner party costing thousands of pounds brings benefit to us all and not have to prove it. I also heard John Spellman pointing out the wonders of the IOM financial compensation scheme for our investors should a bank go to the cleaners. He described it in a typical Government method, assuming we are all thick, so to make it easier for us to understand the scheme, apparently savers in the IOM will receive 75 per cent of £20,000. John, that is £15,000 mate, it's also 50 percent of £30,000. In other words we get less than half of what the UK pays out. Theirs presently stands at £35,000 and is expected to rise to £50,000 next year. Just to add insult to injury, we have the most pathetic response you could imagine from our treasury when they were asked as to why our compensation scheme is lower than the UK's. They said, because we have so many investors with very large deposits, the amount we would pay is not really relevant, or words to that effect. Well there you have it my friends. Its official, the IOM Government holds ordinary Manx savers with contempt.

Well this blog has turned into a bit of a rant. I am sorry to you off Island folk who might not be familiar with what I am talking about. However, many of you have emailed me to say how much you enjoy the political rants from time to time.

September 25, 2008

Last Thursday I visited my consultant to check on how I am getting on. He gave me the all clear for four months. I am told that that it means I've made good progress. 6 months ago I came out of a doctor's surgery having being told I probably only had a short time to live. How life can turn around for you! You just never really know what is in store for you. That is why you should never, ever give up hope no matter how hopeless your situation might seem. I remember lying in bed last February and on occasions thinking to myself, I wonder if I will wake in the morning. Now I fall asleep wondering what I shall do in the morning. I no longer regard myself as being unlucky to have ended up with lung cancer. Far from it, I have been extremely lucky.

I once came very close, as a child, to becoming a pebble. A few months ago I almost became a bench. Let me explain. Sometimes when someone dies, folks have a bench made and set in a favourite place in memory of the person. This morning I listened on the radio to a programme that came live from a children's hospice in Worcester. When the children die, their name is carved into a pebble and placed in a memorial garden, but why a pebble? Well they didn't explain, however, I guess a flower doesn't last very long; a sapling eventually grows in to a strong and healthy tree. These children did not grow into strong and healthy trees. They were, and forever will be, little pebbles. I have never been so moved by anything I have ever heard on the radio. Each child sounded so upbeat and positive. Each of them was making the best of their short lives. It seems that all things of extreme beauty in this world have short lives; flowers, butterflies, animals, birds, sunny days and loving moments and above all, terminally ill children. Last February I shed tears for myself, this morning I felt ashamed of how I reacted to the news I might be dying back then, and wiped away fresh tears for these children, who it seems have decided not to waste tears on themselves. All these children can at anytime go out into the hospice garden and look at the pebbles that represent all the children that have moved onto pastures new. They all know that one day they too will be a pebble. They seem to embrace death with the same level of passion with which they have embraced their short lives. Later today, I will get in touch with the hospice and check on what happens to our terminally ill children on the Island. I sincerely hope that no child is sent off the Island to die. I will, from today on, do whatever I can for our terminally ill children. I hope that you will do likewise.

This is Tom Glassey, on the banks of the Silverburn River, listening to the water dancing over and playing with the pebbles as it makes its way to its destination.

September 26, 2008

One thousand years ago or so, men came from the North. They landed in Peel and proceeded to rape and pillage the Island. I am sure that many of these Vikings were good and noble men, and in the passage of time it would appear that

they probably brought more to the Island than they took. As a child I knew nothing of the Vikings. I had heard of them of course. But apart from a few boat loads of men running around the Island with horns on their hats, that was about as much as we kids knew, or wanted to know. Maybe that is why through the passage of time, a deep suspicion of folk from the North was deeply ingrained in to our souls.

The Man from the North came into Castletown about once or twice a week. We kids didn't know where he came from. He either got off a bus or was dropped in the town for whatever reason, around about the middle of the week and was probably a very decent chap; however we kids were deeply suspicious. We didn't see many strangers in Castletown in those days. I don't know where the phrase came from, "The Man from the North". My brother reckoned he had heard "The Man from the North" had been to prison, although he didn't know what for. It didn't take us kids long though to decide that he was probably a murderer. Billy reckoned "The Man from the North" was from somewhere very far away, another planet even. Micky had heard "The Man from the North" was from a far away place called Ramsey. Whenever we came across "The Man from the North" we crossed the road, and kept our distance. He had never done us any harm and never even threatened to. It was all based on rumour and mystery. One morning we all sat on a bench at the bottom of Peggy Watterson's Hill on the harbour. My brother and the rest of the gang decided to nip into the town for cakes and I was to remain on the bench until they returned. It wasn't long before a man came along and sat beside me on the bench. Soon along came a second man and stopped at our bench, he slapped my bench companion on the back and shouted, "Well, how the hell's the man from the North then!" "I'm fine," said The Man from the North. "How the hell is the mouth from the South?" I could not believe my ears. I was sitting next to The Man from the North on my own, a murderer, someone from another planet, or even Ramsey. After a brief chat the second man moved on, leaving me and The Man from the North alone. My mind started to race, what on Earth was I going to do. With my hands clasped tightly around the wooden struts of the bench I braced myself for sitting it out until my brother and mates returned from the cake shop. The Man from the North began to eat his sandwiches. "Would you like a sandwich son?" he asked in a low gentle voice! "No thanks" I replied, thinking it might be poisoned or something. The Man from the North finished his sandwiches. "Would you like a bar of chocolate then lad?" "No thank you" I said. "Here then lad, give me your hand," said The Man from the North. I loosened my grip on the timber struts of the bench. The Man from the North took hold of my hand and placed in my palm a two shilling piece. "There lad, you buy your own chocolate then with that!" The Man from the North stood up and gave me a warm hug. Then simply walked away and went about his business. My brother and mates were soon back with me again. They had returned sometime before The Man from the North had gone, but didn't want to come and join us. We spent the two shillings in Peggy's toyshop and never lived in fear of The Man from the North again. The fearful Man from the North became a friend, a visit we looked forward too. There were many more sixpences, shillings and the odd two shilling piece thereafter.

I never got to know his name or anything about him. If The Man from the North is still with us, here is a very special thank you to The Man from the North, from a former child of the South.

September 29, 2008

I think Sackers lived in the School Hill end of Castletown. I never knew his real name or got to find out whom he really was. I only remember him being about 19 or 20. He never seemed to progress beyond that age. Of course to us 6 or 7 year old kids, he was all but an old man. He was a kid's dream, a sort of kid's handyman, always on hand to fix wheelbarrows, boogies or whatever. With a few bits of driftwood found on the beach, a length or two of old rope and an hour later or so, Sackers would have built us a raft. Sometimes I would sit on the bench at the bottom of Peggy's Hill, and along would come Sackers. He would plonk himself down beside me, fish a small lump of wood from his pocket, flick out his pen knife and 15 minutes later I had a small carving of a boat.

Word had got out around the town that someone had got hold of an air gun. Now then I thought to myself, "A gun! That is what I need." I told Sackers that I thought it would be good if I had a gun. "NO, I think not," said Sackers. "Well a bow and arrow then," I sulkily suggested." Sackers tapped me on the shoulder and getting to his feet, he muttered. "I'll find something for you!" A few minutes later, Sackers returned and handed me a box. "Go on then," said Sackers, "open it up." I sat there cradling my brand new water pistol. Yes, this was the bee's knees. Blimey, I didn't even need to be a good shot to hit the target. "OK" said Sackers, "let's go and fill her up then." Sackers returned a couple of minutes later, having filled my water pistol from Peggy's toyshop where he had bought it. I began my sniping immediately. The bench at the bottom of Peggy's Hill was the ideal place for a blind sniper to learn his trade. You could clearly hear all the passers by as they passed within a few feet of me, heading for the bridge over the harbour. My victims were mostly women, as they were the ones dragging their shopping from town to the Janet's Corner housing estate. Sackers, obviously realizing his mistake, disappeared after the second blast of, "Tom Glassey, your Father will be getting a visit from me this evening!" Indeed by the time an hour had passed by, if all the women that had threatened me with a visit had turned up at our house, we were going to be in for a very busy evening, and a very full house. Later that day, the gang and myself met to discuss our options regarding my new weapon. We floated the idea of filling it with milk or even tomato sauce. These ideas never got time to get off the ground as by late afternoon, Sackers had found me and probably because he had been given earache by Lord knows how many folk in the town, had come to take his water pistol back into safe custody. Sackers was a good hearted old stick though, and of course he didn't really have the heart to take back his gift which he knew had given me so much joy, so he had been back to Peggy's shop and bought a cap gun. It was a very expensive day at the office for poor old Sackers on that day, especially for someone that was used to making everything himself. The cap gun just didn't cut it for me though. It was a politician's gun. It made a big bang, and a puff of smoke but nothing else. It didn't actually shoot anyone or cause much a reaction from anybody. I know not where Sackers is today, however, he is probably carving small objects, building rafts, and supplying water pistols for his grand children, so that they too can play and shoot their way through a very happy childhood.

October 1, 2008

In the last blog I was talking about guns, my brief ownership of a water pistol and cap gun. Another form of a firearm we had as kids was the peashooter and I had one just like everyone else. It was just a simple piece of pipe about 6 inches long, which I'm sure we bought in Peggy Watterson's toyshop for about a shilling or so. With a bag of hard peas nicked from someone's mum, we would sit happily picking off shoppers as they made their way home from Castletown. Of course being hit by a hard pea never did anyone any harm, and little notice was ever really taken of the peashooter. Until that is, one day the mother of all peashooters came to town.

Gordon Cooil was a lovable sort of man. He was full of hell and always up to devilment. He was a kid's dream. A plumber by trade and will be remembered as one of Castletown's real characters. He had a deep booming voice, which was usually laughing. I would often be heading up Malew Street and on hearing Gordon's voice coming from way down Arbory Street, I would head for the voice, for I knew as a kid, I was going to be in for some fun. One day, word reached us that Gordon had rigged up the mother of all peashooters on Arbory Street. The peashooter turned out to be a piece of

drainpipe attached to a compressor. The pea was a ball of putty, which was then fired from the drainpipe out over the square landing, wherever. I remember standing by the telephone box on the square one day as one of Gordon's balls of putty smashed into the telephone box like a wonky skud missile. I'm not sure if anyone actually got hit by one of Gordon's super peas. If they did, I'm sure no-one ever got hurt. It was probably Constable Cleater or Crebbon that eventually put an end to the mighty peashooter with no more than a bit of a talking too. Well what the heck would Constable Plod do anyway in Castletown back in the early 60's on a sunny afternoon, if it weren't for the likes of Gordon experimenting with his latest weapon or gimmick? When people write about Castletown's heritage and it's great characters of the past, most of them will recall such high flyers as the poet T.E.Brown, and Lord Nelson's right-hand man, John Quilliam. However, whenever I recall great folk of the past, I bring to mind folks such as Gordon Cooil. His wonderful deep and rich booming voice gave him a unique identity. For me, he was the very voice of Castletown itself. When I was a child, he entertained me with his antics. When I was a young man his presence in the Union and other pubs around the town brought much laughter into my life. Sure they won't erect any statues or plaques around the town in Gordon's memory, but then they don't need to because I, for one, will never forget him.

October 2, 2008

It's Thursday afternoon. This week has been a real turning point for me. I actually feel now as if I am getting back towards full fitness. A couple of weeks ago I hit a really bad patch. I was actually in the midst of some severe side effects of radiation. It felt much worse than that. I had been warned of the side effects of radiation; however, I was expecting them to arrive soon after treatment or even during treatment not three months after, and not all at the same time. My days became very short. I would wake in the morning feeling a little tired. By lunchtime the tiredness would be so bad I would hardly be able to remain awake. By teatime I would be so cold that I would have to go to bed. I developed a violent cough and would cough until I was sick. I felt so ill that I started to believe that I would not recover again. I was so far from my former fitness that I simply couldn't see myself getting out and about and walking the dog again. I even began to think that the cancer was returning. I kept these thoughts to myself though. Me knowing, or thinking these things was one thing, but I didn't want friends and family to know how bad things seemed or to connect with my negative thoughts. From the start of this week I have begun to return from my downward slide. The tiredness vanished. Also the shivers and coldness disappeared. The violent coughing, with the help of a course of steroids, has been reduced to a tickle. I am walking Skipper once again, even in the wind. Things I thought I would never do again, I am now engaging in as if I had never stopped. Throughout my entire ordeal of lung cancer I never stopped telling myself that I would get the better of it. I found strength I did not know I had. Throughout chemotherapy and radiation treatment I told myself that every step I took was one more step along the road to full health once again. That practice worked I am sure. However, the side effects of the radiation and probably the chemo combined did prove a much harder nut for me to crack. I have been surrounded by wonderful nurses, doctors and consultants that have been a great help. Of course towering above all of them has been my wife Barbara. This last year has probably been even more difficult for her than it was for me. I am so grateful to have sailed through the worst storm of my life. They say that the tail end of a hurricane can be worse than the actual hurricane itself. Well, if cancer were the hurricane then yes, in my case I would prefer to deal with its head any time. Life might not be a bed of roses for you at present; I am sure most of you have had your ups and downs. What I have learnt though over the course of the last year is, no matter how bad things are, no matter how hopeless life seems, no matter how dank and dark your situation appears, if you don't have the physical strength to literally put one foot in front of the other, then at least think of getting better, even if its only in your mind. Remember, your darkest hour, is your darkest hour, it can only get brighter once it has past. Yes, life can be cruel, it often is. However, there is a lot of truth in that old saying. "You have to be cruel to be kind." Sometimes life needs to be cruel for a period to enable us to learn difficult lessons and go on to appreciate life in a much more fulfilling way than we might have done had we not suffered a misfortune. Believe me, once you have sailed through a severe storm, a calm sea is something you will never take for granted ever again.

October 3, 2008

Sorry folks, no the large vessel seen in Douglas Bay this morning was not the Steam Packet's new fast craft. It was a farewell visit from the QE2. Although as she has never visited us before, I'm not sure why she called it a farewell visit, I guess it must have been a sort of hello-good-bye job. Having just checked out AIS, she is now heading for the Mersey bar and making 19 knots. The QE2 arrived from Cork early this morning and set off for Liverpool around 7 a.m., the same time as the Viking would have left on her Steam Packet sailing for Liverpool. So, why didn't the Packet charter the QE2 to take the 7 a.m Liverpool sailing as they were going there anyway?

For many years the QE2 lay in Derbyhaven. Well at least an old tub lay on the breakwater in the early 60's with the name QE2 on her bow. On further investigation though, this vessel turned out to be named Kewaige the 2nd and was merely a play on words. Cunard have always named their flagships after Britain's queens. Why then did we have to wait so long for them to name one of their liners after Queen Victoria? The Steam Packet had a Victoria bought in 1927 and broken up in 1957, so what took Cunard so long? Well the story goes, that back in 1935 when Cunard were building what was to be the Queen Victoria, the chairman of Cunard was having dinner with King George the 5th, or was it the 6th. Anyway the King asked the question, "What are you going to call your new liner?" "We thought we would call her after Britain's greatest queen!" replied the chairman. "Wonderful," replied the King. "When I get home I will tell my wife, she will be delighted." So, Cunard had no choice but to call their new liner "The Queen Mary."

The QE2 will go out of service in November and become a floating hotel in Dubai. However, has she not been that ever since she was built in 1967? I wish the QE2 a long and happy retirement. However, I hope that as I write they are not presently laying the keel of the "King Charles the 3rd!" I will, however, settle for Cunard to name the next liner after Charlie, provided they do the same as the Steam Packet and leave it 1000 years before they get round to it. i.e."King Orry"

October 6, 2008

I woke up at 3am and I have been awake ever since. It started with Skipper wanting out for a pee, and then of course I simply could not get back to sleep again. At 4:30, I gave in trying to sleep and went and made a cup of tea and turned on the radio. I heard someone say. "In America, they have Johnny cash, Bob Hope, and Stevie Wonder! In the UK we have no cash, no hope, and no wonder!" Well I'm not sure what that is supposed to mean but I thought I would share it with you.

I went to the Duck's Nest last night with my brother Lenny. First time I have been to the pub for ages. I had 2 pints and returned home. The burning topic of the day in there was not the financial crisis that is gripping the country. No, it was Liverpool's last minute winner against Manchester City. It's heartening to note that people have not lost their sense of prospective. Still, I guess it is only people who have money that worry about money.

The Gatherings have commenced once again on Friday evenings. I guess it doesn't really matter what stories are making the news. As far as we are concerned the only topics of conversation on or around our table at present are football, how stupid our government is, and the weather. Oddly enough, this has always been the case, and even if things improve we will probably say, "It cannot last." Well I have trawled the wave bands and the Internet in a bid to find some happy news to share with you, but alas I have failed. Never mind, it is not raining, we are not at war, we are not starving and we are warm and dry. Life could be a whole lot worse. Put the kettle on and cheer up. I will be back tomorrow.

October 7, 2008

A few days ago, I dedicated the blog to a wonderful Castletown character, Gordon Cooil, who sadly has now past on. It was heartening to receive emails from various parts of the world from Manxies who have fled the nest and still remember Gordon with such fondness. Steve, in New Zealand, still recalls being wound up by both Gordon and his brother Juan, in the Union pub. I hope you did not waste too much time looking for those pearls in the Silverburn River, Steve, that obviously made a fortune for Gordon and Juan. Since I began writing this blog I have often been amazed at the response from people from just about every corner of the planet. I have made so many friends, even though many of them I shall never meet. Some folk have not stopped at emails. No, I have arrived home to bottles of whisky left on the front step, even a body warmer sent by Dorothy from Liverpool on my birthday. The most unusual gift of all though came my way via Sean, from London, a couple of months ago. Whilst Sean was in his flat in London, he painstakingly carved out of balsa wood, a wooden chart of Castletown Bay and the surrounding area. The chart has been created in such a way that you can actually feel all the rocks and features of the bay. You can even tell the depth of water, as Sean has layered the thin timber sheets so that they reflect the depth of water in the bay. Even the bell bouy is featured and just for good measure he has even included our house. It must have taken Sean an absolute age to complete this masterpiece, and to say that I am grateful is an understatement.

Someone has just called me from Port Erin and told me that it is about time I wrote a blog about lettuce. Yes, lettuce! Well I have sat and pondered this for the last 10 minutes and have concluded that there is absolutely nothing I can add to people's knowledge about lettuce that they don't already know.

Well people, that is just about it for today. It is now time for me to brave the rain, and head up the Silverburn with Mr. Skipper and Barbara. Providing I can think of something worth writing about tomorrow I shall be back at about the same time. Of course whether the subject has been worth me writing about it or not, it has never stopped me up until now.

I include this month's edition of my Manx Tails article for our overseas friends.

<u>As Manx as the Hills</u>

As I sit here writing up this article, the rain is teeming from the sky. It rained all day yesterday, and according to the forecast; it will do so again today. The Silverburn that flows at the bottom of our garden has been transformed from a gentle stream to a raging river and is carrying vast amounts of water from the hills. It seems to me that it is only water that comes down from the hills these days. It wasn't always that way though. 30 years or so ago, all kinds of things came down from those hills, and the hills were indeed alive with the sound of music. However, the music stemmed from a few Foxdale men making their way back to the hills after a good night out.

Every Tuesday, Robert Kinvig, a sheep farmer, would make his way down from the hills to do his shopping in Castletown. He would always finish up by having a pint in the Union. Robert would never alter his watch. His watch was always on GMT. His point being that they are not to an hour or two up in Ronague. I recall Robert coming in to the Union one October morning. The clocks had all gone back an hour the night before. Someone asked Robert had he remembered to put his watch back an hour. His reply was. "Of course not boy, I knew you would all come round to my way of thinking eventually." On Friday evenings, Wilson Costain and Bobby Pope would come down from the hills and usually spend the evening in the Castletown pubs. Wilson was full of tricks, and in most folk's opinion, full of hell. One of his tricks was to take a pint of bitter and push it flat against the ceiling. Then he would take a sweeping brush and hold the brush against the glass. He would then hand the brush handle to someone and bet them that they couldn't hold that pint up against the ceiling. He would then wander off leaving some poor sod stuck in the middle of the bar, supporting a brush under a pint, the person was totally unable to move as of course as soon as the pressure was slackened on the brush, the pint would have come down on his head. In other pubs they would earn their beer money by raking havoc by bending coins with beer bottles and lifting tables up in the air using an empty glass. At closing time, they would wend their way back in to the hills singing at the top of their voices all the way to Foxdale.

On one occasion Bobby and Wilson both arrived home drunk and collapsed in front of the fireplace. They obviously took some kind of an argument before they fell asleep and one of them clobbered the other with the poker. When they awoke at 4 a.m. or so the next morning, they both thought they had been attacked during the night and called the police. Of course that was back in the days when the police knew everyone in their area, and of course it didn't take the policeman long to work out what had happened. I am sure the policeman laughed the incident off. Today they would have been charged with wasting police time.

As I said, it appears that it is only water that flows down from the hills now. The characters seemingly have all gone. The hills have many more stories than I am able to relate. Seemingly we have more rain coming down from the hills now than ever before. Perhaps the hills are also grieving for those Manx characters that appear to have vanished completely, for they were as Manx as the hills, we miss them dearly, and judging by the floods of water flowing down the Silverburn, the hills are crying too.

October 8, 2008

I have been keeping my eye on the QE2 on the AIS system, as she makes her way around Britain on her farewell cruise before she becomes a floating hotel in Dubai. At the time of writing, she has just left South Queensferry for Newcastle. Last week she called into Douglas Bay and many folks got up early to go and take a look at her. I can understand why people would want to go and see such a prestigious ship. I have been ship mad, or at least boat mad, just about all my life. Yet the visit of the QE2 just didn't do anything for me. Some people will have had to get out of bed at around 4 a.m. in order to catch a glimpse of this floating majesty.

Many times in the past I have had to arise early on behalf of a boat. Frequently as a teenager I would be out of my bed at 3 or 4 in the morning to go and haul lobster pots with my lifelong friend, Michael Quine, who owned and fished from the boat *Siesta*. The boat was just a 16-foot long timber vessel with an outboard engine. In winter we would freeze, and when we came ashore several hours after sailing our feet were so cold, we could hardly feel the ground beneath them. On occasions when I arrived home after a rough trip, I would say “never again”. Yet the following morning I would drag myself from my bed and repeat the whole exercise all over again. In the summertime it was a different story though, getting up just as the dawn chorus was beginning. We would walk out to Derbyhaven carrying cans of petrol, lunch and flasks. With a gentle sea breeze blowing through your hair, the dawn chorus getting louder and louder as you walked, and the sound of the waves braking on the shore, it was the most pleasant walk to work anyone could have. We would have to row out to the *Siesta* in a small punt. Once we had loaded all our gear, Michael would give a pull on the outboard and we were away. The *Siesta* was small and cramped. There was no shelter from the elements and just enough room to sit between the ropes, anchors, boat hooks, and lobster pots. You were wet through for the whole voyage. However, for me there was nothing more exhilarating than feeling the little *Siesta* gently rise and fall over the small waves as we headed out from Derbyhaven breakwater for a day’s lobstering. With the sea breeze, the sun in my face, and the *Siesta* gently dancing beneath my feet, it was the most magical experience in the world. For me the QE2 doesn’t even come close to my many voyages on the *Siesta*. If I had been offered the choice of cruising to some of the great exotic places in this world onboard the QE2, there would have been no contest. When I was onboard the little *Siesta,* I really was at sea doing what I loved best, and I was the luckiest kid/teenager to have had so many wonderful experiences. I’m sure sailing on the QE2 is a wonderful, once in a lifetime experience for many people. However I had hundreds of thrilling trips, and spent endless happy days onboard the little *Siesta*. Wild horses would not have got me from my bed to go and say farewell to the QE2 last week. But it would have taken wild horses to keep me in my bed 35 years ago from spending a day fishing on the *Siesta*. Maybe sometimes we can see the stars, but not the ground beneath our feet. Happiness sometimes can be found right under your nose.

October 10, 2008

I first started blogging last February. Before then I didn’t even know what a blog was. Having being diagnosed with lung cancer and with my future looking pretty bleak, someone suggested I should write a blog. My wife Barbara, being something of a computer techy, set me up and I have been blogging away ever since. To date almost 17,000 people have logged onto my blog and I have made friends and established contacts with people from all over the world. Indeed the articles in Manx Tails have only come about as a result of my daily Internet blog.

At first I didn’t see the point in writing down my thoughts each day. I was dying of cancer and probably didn’t have enough time left to write much of a blog. So what was the point? None-the-less I began the blog whilst feeling sorry for myself and there didn’t seem very much else I could do from a positive point of view at that time. I simply wrote each day on how I felt, and through my blogging I began to learn how to cope with lung cancer. I received emails from every part of the world from other people, some of whom had cancer themselves, some had survived it and others were in the throws of it. Whatever, we were all in the same boat, so to speak. Almost one year on, I have received chemotherapy and radiotherapy and I feel like I have been to Hell and back. I have been incredibly lucky to have received such wonderful medical attention. My friends and family have given me amazing support during my ordeal and of course my wife Barbara has been a rock. Alongside all these things there has been my blog.

My blog was without doubt one of the best things I did after being diagnosed. I would put the blog right up there with chemotherapy inasmuch as the blog was largely responsible for getting my mind right. Speaking to other people in the same position and receiving all their emails wishing and praying for me, just made me want to overcome my predicament even more so. I began to feel as if I was not just fighting cancer for myself, but for everyone else as well. The chemotherapy and radiation treatment available today is fantastic. However, it is absolutely vital that you get your mind right as well. Only you yourself, and your friends and family can do this. So here I am, having risen from the depths of despair where I languished last February, to a much brighter and more optimistic future. I didn’t have a future last February. In the beginning, my blog was mostly about cancer and how ill I was. Through the weeks and months it changed and reflected my progress. Today, I hardly ever mention cancer.

I don’t blog every day these days, just two or three times a week. At one point I thought the blog had probably served its purpose and should be brought to an end. However, when push came to shove, I couldn’t shoot the friend that had stood by me through my darkest days; The blog and the folk who read it had been an ear to bend, an eye that sobbed, a hand to hold and most of all, a friend that smiles and laughs during these much brighter days. I am of course extremely grateful for all my medical support. However, I am in no doubt at all that writing my blog and sharing my fate with people from every walk of life around the globe, has played a major part in my recovery.

October 13, 2008

This Wednesday I have been invited to speak at a seminar, which has been setup for the welfare of cancer sufferers. The idea is that a group of doctors, nurses and consultants have come together and would like some input in to what cancer patients would like or how they might benefit more through our health and voluntary services. If any of you, have any ideas you would like me to put forward, just email me.

I note the banking situation just keeps getting worse. My old employers the RBS went to Gordon Brown with a begging bowl looking for 20 billion quid last night, and of course they got it. Here on the Isle of Man though, I note we are still getting our priorities right. I turned on Manx Radio at lunchtime yesterday thinking I might learn more regarding the Singer and Friedlander situation and what do you think the phone-in topic was? Busses, yes busses! Yes whilst thousands of people are worrying about their savings, the good old Mannin line discusses the state of the busses. If a nuclear bomb were dropped on the Island tomorrow they would probably discuss dog dirt.

Well, that is about it from me folks. I conclude today with a little article, which comes my way from Pam Brown in the Northeast of England. It is relevant to the present banking situation, and if you fear you might be going to loose some cash in the present crash, this might help you gain some prospective. But probably not!

The Present

Imagine there was a bank that credited your very own account each morning with a large sum of money. But, it carried over no balance from day to day. Every evening it deleted whatever part of the balance you failed to use during the day. What would you do? Draw out all of it, of course!

Each of us has such a bank. Its name is - Time. Every morning, it credits you with 86,400 seconds. Every night it writes off, as lost, whatever of this you have failed to invest to good purpose. It carries over no balance. It allows no overdraft.

Each day it makes a new deposit for you. Each night it burns the remains of the day. If you fail to use the day's deposits, the loss is yours. There is no going back. There is no drawing against the "tomorrow." You must live in the present on today's deposits. Invest it so as to get from it the utmost in health, happiness, and success!

The clock is running. Make the most of today. And remember that time waits for no one. Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. But today is a gift. That's why it's called The Present!

October 14, 2008

Hello folks, I have been thinking about neighbours lately. When I was a kid growing up at Janet's Corner, the entire housing estate were your neighbours really. The neighbours seemed to spend as much time in your house then, as they did their own. We borrowed bread, sugar, and even money from each other. I can't remember anyone being regarded as a bad neighbour. No loud music ever came from next door, but then we didn't have stereo players. Somehow Jim Reeves and Cliff Richards being played on a grammar phone didn't exactly send the ornaments crashing from the shelves. When we lived in Ramsey our neighbours spent the whole day screaming and shouting at each other. They kept it up all day. It wasn't too bad in the winter as the doors and windows were shut. However, it could be a real pain during the summer months. In our present house, we have Tom and Dee on one side; they are no bother and spend a lot of time away. On the other side we have a gentleman who keeps himself to himself. He has not spoken to us once in the 10 years we have lived here. I have heard the occasional grunt. If he does happen to read this blog, well hello mate, hope everything is OK with you.

When we lived in Port St. Mary, our next-door neighbours were Michael and Joanne Keig. They now own the chippie in Port St. Mary. They were brilliant neighbours. Joanne used to bake the most fantastic cakes. Mike was a brilliant handyman and could, and usually did do just about any job you wanted doing. One Friday night Barbara and I went to the pub and on our return, our entire kitchen floor had been tiled.

Joanne kept a fairly tight reign on Mike. Both he and I liked a little trip to the pub. Joanne was not always enthusiastic regarding Mikes little jaunts to the Station but thankfully she never spent too much time in the greenhouse. Mike would leave a pair of shoes in the greenhouse but always made sure he left a tenner in one of his shoes. He would slip out to the greenhouse about 8.30 or so and we would both leg it down to the Station. I don't know how Mike explained the smell of beer on his breath to Joanne when he had supposedly been messing about with his tomatoes and pricking out his seedlings. I shall ask him when I visit the chippie later this week.

Well its now time for me to take a little walk with Skipper. They have issued a flood warning for this afternoon, so if I don't get washed away, I shall see you tomorrow.

October 15, 2008

Today I was supposed to be speaking at a cancer seminar at Nobles Hospital. However, for reasons unknown to me at present, it has been cancelled until after Christmas.

I had never heard of the word oncology until I began my chemotherapy at the oncology unit at Nobles. I have still never come across a hospital with a cancer department. The word oncology reminds me of the Civic Amenity Centre. We used to call that, The Tip!

I used to be a blind child, and then I was a blind man. Now, I am visually impaired, even though as far as I know, there is nothing the matter with my face. In some places they have educational transport modules. Blimey, it seems even the days of the school bus are now numbered.

When my taxi pulled up at Clatterbridge at the oncology department, I felt a little bit like the condemned man arriving at the condemned cell. You are in a strange land, in a strange hospital and amongst strangers. You have very little idea of what is going to happen to you. Of course those strangers soon become friends and the staff at Clatterbridge are about the best in the world. However, in my case I was lucky. For most of my 4 weeks there, I had either my wife or friends from home. Imagine what it must be like though, for someone to arrive alone in such a place. You are probably at the lowest ebb of your life, having been diagnosed with cancer and you find yourself in a strange town, in a strange hospital, and just to cap it all, you will be sleeping probably in a B&B somewhere nearby. Four weeks must seem like a very long time under those circumstances. For someone with children and pets it won't be easy to just up sticks and go along. Kids and pets need looking after. Surely it would make good sense for the department of health to buy or rent a place in or near Clatterbridge, somewhere with a kitchen, a sitting room and 3 or 4 bedrooms. At least cancer suffers would not be suffering alone. Well have I reached the beginning of another campaign? I shall campaign away, although in the present climate it is very unlikely that treasury will be able to free any more money up. Let's hope that if such a place does come to light, they don't call it Oncology Hall.

Now then, yesterday I was talking about neighbours, I didn't get around to all of my former neighbours yesterday so here is part 2.

When we lived in St Johns one of my neighbours was a retired barrister, called Earnest. I used to pop over to him every morning for a glass of malt before I headed off to Peel to do both his, and our shopping. His wife Martha would frequently phone Barbara in the middle of the night believing she was about to die. It wasn't that unusual either for the doctor's car to be in our lane in the early hours of the morning. On the other side of us lived a couple who had been building their house for a number of years with slow progress. Anyway, one day Earnest said to me over our glass of malt, "Tom, I am sick of that bloody building site across the way, and we are going to do something about it." "We" I said. "Yes we," answered Earnest. "We are going to set fire to it!" "Earnest," I said, "As much as I like you, I don't really want to spend the rest of my life in prison with you." "But that won't happen," replied Earnest. "Just think about it, what jury would ever convict an 80 year old ex-barrister, and a blind man of arson."

October 16, 2008

Barbara has almost completed a painting of Derbyhaven. She tells me it will be finished today, so I will attach the picture of it to one of next week's blogs. Derbyhaven has always been a very special place to me, unfortunately though, today the village has lost its character and charm. It is almost as if someone came along and selected the right kind of people,

built the right type of houses and just super imposed the new Derbyhaven over the top of the old one. When I was a child, Derbyhaven had a church, a hotel, and a shop. Before then there was a school and if we go back far enough, the village was a thriving port which even had its own customhouse. Ships discharged cargo on the breakwater. Of course nothing remains the same forever and there is a touch of nostalgia in all of us. None-the-less, why is it that just a mile down the road, Castletown remains more or less the same? It still has its schools, churches, shops, and is basically unspoiled. The only public amenity left now in Derbyhaven is the phone box, and I am not even sure if that is still there. I recall as a child traveling out there in my Uncle Joe's jeep to deliver milk when he worked at Rigalls farm. I also remember the minibus driving round Janet's Corner collecting staff to wait-on at the hotel functions. There was also Renaldo from the Golflinks Hotel who used to ride around in his minibus, trying to entice our Janet's Corner women to come and work in his hotel out at the Golflinks for maybe a penny or two more per hour. In my youth I fished lobsters out of Derbyhaven on the *Siesta* with my old pal Micky Quine. In those days we sold all the lobsters to the hotel. So the village of Derbyhaven, back in those days, was not just a nice scenic village to paint. It was a thriving little community, providing work for our women, and beer money for me. I believe there is a residents association now at Derbyhaven, although I can't think why they would need one. Maybe they have found their Heaven and now want to pull up the ladder to prevent anyone else from entering. Well if that is their aim, they have had great success, even God eventually moved out of his house to make way for a private resident. But perhaps I am being a tad harsh on the Derbyhaven residents. After all, they did not close the school, the church, and the hotel. However, they didn't exactly put up any 'Welcome to Derbyhaven' signs and they haven't made any effort to create a vibrant village. I am told a bus goes out there twice a day but no one has ever been seen getting on or off it. Someone once spotted a taxi out there, but that was about 4 years ago. I don't think even Father Christmas bothers calling there these days. Mind you when I stop and think about it, Derbyhaven must be the smallest town or village in the world to have its own airport, an 18 hole golf links and a harbour.
Okay, so the fishing boats and cargo ships will never return to Derbyhaven. The hotel, school and shop are gone forever. Its still a beautiful village and nostalgia will always get up to it's old tricks. I will continue to relive my childhood memories. Whatever happens now or in the future we must not pine too much. Derbyhaven is still part of Louis Armstrong's Wonderful World.

October 17, 2008

Good morning folks. Another weekend has come around once again. We have a fine day today; however we have a Southwesterly Force 8 and heavy rain forecast for Sunday.

Yesterday I was talking about the village of Derbyhaven, so I shall just finish off before I move on. Since writing yesterday's blog it has been brought to my attention that Derbyhaven has its own Mayor. Yes it seems his name is Dave, he is a Scouser and a plumber by trade, and married to Jackie. He drinks in the Sidings and has also been spotted in the Gluepot.

It is said that the village takes its name from the fact that the Derby use to be run there, but that was almost 400 years ago and as far as I know, the petition to make sure it doesn't happen again is still circulating around the village. As far as I know, Derbyhaven has never had a football team. The village of Colby, I'm told used to have two, Colby FC and Colby Level, well that was according to some old guy I once met in the Colby Glen pub. He told me Colby Level had this brilliant centre forward who was a top goal scorer. Unfortunately I can't remember his name. Anyway there was no love lost between Colby FC and Colby Level. Now it seems this guy who played for the Level had left his wife and had not paid any maintenance, so whenever the fixture between the two clubs came around, the captain of Colby FC would go and report the Levels's centre forward to the police who would come and arrest him, making sure he could not take part in the fixture. You would have thought he would have wised up and legged it whenever the fixture came round wouldn't you? Micky Mcfee is widely regarded as the Mayor of Colby. He can usually be seen tramping around the village in his wellies during the daytime. He is also to be seen and heard around 9 p.m. making his way home from the Colby Glen and singing 'The Old Rugged Cross' at the top of his voice. Every village has its claim to fame. Roy Faragher lived in the village of Santon and may well still dwell there for all I know. Roy worked for the DHPP or highway board, as it was known then. His job was painting the yellow lines on the road and I am told that Roy holds the record for the most fines for parking on yellow lines.

Okay, that's quite enough of my nonsense for today. Have a good weekend and I will be back on Monday morning.

October 20, 2008

I am not a motor racing fan, however, yesterday I found myself listening to the race on the radio. It seems Lewis Hamilton was about to make a pit stop when he received a text message, which read. "Lewis if you are calling at the garage, can you pick me up a Twix!" I believe his pit stop lasted about 6 seconds, so if he did manage to collect a Twix he did well, not to mention the girl who served him. I know from my own experience that Barbara has never managed to fill our car with petrol, change all four tyres and collect a loaf of bread in anything close to 6 seconds. It is very easy though to send a text message to the wrong person. I once sent a text message to my boatman, Chris, only I typed in the wrong number and someone called Ian in Douglas received my message asking him to have my boat ready on the Gluepot steps at 3 p.m., as we are sailing for Port St. Mary. I don't know why, but Ian decided to invite the Bishop along for the trip. As it turned out, neither Ian nor the Bishop turned up for the voyage. I guess one of the most famous messages to be misinterpreted was a message that was sent over the airwaves during the 1st World War, back to head quarters. The message was interpreted as saying. "Send 2 and fourpence, we are going to a dance!" The message actually was "Send reinforcements, we are going to advance!"

Well on this wild and stormy day folks that is just about it from me, so until tomorrow, this is Tom Glassey on the banks of the Silverburn River.

October 22, 2008

This has not been my best week. I have been riddled with flaming pleurisy. If you have never had pleurisy, then I hope you never discover it. If you have, you will know how bloody painful it is.

The credit crunch is well and truly with us now, although I am not absolutely certain just exactly what a credit crunch is. Visa cards and the rest of them are still writing to me offering credit. Back in the 60's and early 70's we had something called hirer purchase. I remember buying a wireless on hirer purchase. First I had to fill in a form in the shop and then take the form and get is signed by my local vicar and the sergeant at Castletown police station. How the local vicar was in a position to say my credit was good, God only knows, as it was the first time we had ever met. Anyway I got my wireless and paid 13 shillings a month for who knows how long. There was many an evening I cursed buying the wireless

as I worked until 7 at night trying to get it paid off. Incidentally I don't think I ever did; thank Geoff Clayton, my mate, who was the sergeant's son, for forging his dad's signature. I don't think I had a bank account until I was about 30. Up until then, I was always paid with a weekly wage packet. There was no point in opening a bank account. Once I had given Mother her whack, I spent what was left and there was never enough left over to save or shove away in a bank account. So, I had pound notes in my pocket and when they were gone, they were gone. I simply can't imagine what life would have been like if the good folk of Janet's Corner had been given plastic cards, and could wander into a big shop, buy half the shop with money they didn't have, and then get a load of cash back at the counter. The card for most of us would have been the key to utopia. Thank Heavens we never had them.

October 23, 2008

Good morning doesn't really seem appropriate this morning, unless you are parked before a roaring fire and don't have to go out. The wind is blowing from the Southwest at about Force 8. The weather forecasters say it will increase to Force 9 by lunchtime. It is also raining and they are saying we will have maybe an inch of rain.

The so-called *Super Seacat* isn't very super and is tied up in Douglas Harbour; she neither fights like a Viking nor performs like Superman. Meanwhile the Ben My Chree is making a steady 16 knots on passage for Heysham. The Ben has made that fruitcake that wrote that poem about her look a tad foolish on days like this. Well at least M & S and Tescos will have food on their shelves tomorrow as it seems just one day without the Ben sailing, empties their entire store. I guess this wind is bad enough, however back in the days of the Ramsey Steamships fleet of small steamers, one of their notorious skippers was Captain John Dan Kelly. He was known by his friends as John Dan. I have a cassette tape of him where he is describing the foul weather conditions as he tried to coal lighthouses in the Atlantic off the west coast of Ireland. John said, "The wind is that powerful out here, you would be afraid to open your mouth for fear you would not be able to close it again!" The men who crewed these little steamers were hardy souls. In rough weather, sometimes they would have to go the whole voyage of 10 or even 20 hours without a hot drink. The steam engines were completely open, with no safety guards in those days. Once on passage from the Island to Liverpool, a stoker stumbled into the works of the engine and the crew could not stop the engine for fear of losing the ship, so they had to carry on to Liverpool with the stoker getting chopped up in to smaller and smaller pieces until they reached Liverpool. I am told that all that could be found on arrival in Liverpool was a boot and some clothing. During the height of the troubles in Ireland, the IRA mistook the Ben Vooar for a UK vessel and planted a bomb on her in Cork Harbour. The bomb went off at around 3 a.m. waking most of the population of Cork and blowing the mast out of the Ben Vooar. Her captain was an Irish man funnily enough, by the name of George McGavick, who liked a drink or two. He slept in his cabin right throughout the whole business and never heard a thing. Of course it was always nice when you could go ashore and have a few beers. A vessel once arrived in Castletown with 200 ton of coal. They came along side at around 3 in the morning, so they decided they would get their heads down for a few hours and then enjoy the day ashore in Castletown. The problem was, it was in the middle of the Southern 100 races and to avoid having to work around closed roads later that afternoon, a team of Dockers was onboard discharging the boat by 4 a.m. and by about 10 a.m. the vessel was empty and on her way to Liverpool again.

Well that is about it for today folks. I will be back tomorrow with more stories from the Lord knows where. Anyway enjoy the rest of your day, and be grateful that you are not being tossed about on a tiny steamer in the middle of the Irish Sea.

October 24, 2008

Well the Super Seacat is still sleeping in Douglas Harbour, and the Ben has sailed, but very late, for Heysham. I very much doubt that Super Seacat will have discovered any of her super powers by tomorrow as the weather is going to be worse by then. If you are planning to cross the water tomorrow, I would book your flight now if I were you. The southwesterly gale reached a maximum speed of 58 knots at Castletown Breakwater, that's about 65 mph. Still, we did not get the very heavy rain they predicted.

Doesn't the over the top security drive you round the twist these days? There once was a time not that long ago, when you could turn up to catch the 9 a.m. sailing to Liverpool at one minute to 9, with no ticket. You could buy your ticket at the foot of the gangway and simply walk onboard. I remember as a kid one day at the airport, wandering out onto the tarmac and feeling my way all around a Dakota aeroplane. John Cooil, who was part of the airport fixtures and fittings at that time, even came out and took me onboard the plane. They tell me the security is very strict at Tynwald, with metal detectors and cameras. These days our MHK'S are forever telling us they are on a world stage. Well I am willing to bet that al Qaeda have never heard of Tynwald. Anyway the security they employ there would not stop the real fruitcakes from getting in. They just stand for election. Well my wonderful friend and nurse has now arrived and Barbara has just put the kettle on, so I will bid you all good-bye until Monday.

October 27, 2008

Hello folks, it's bitterly cold today, and the wind has swung round to the Northwest. They say it will be even colder tomorrow and for the rest of the week. We have to go to Douglas later; gosh it seems like a bit of an ordeal now to go to Douglas. It has to be something really important to make me go to Douglas.

When I was a youngster, going to Douglas was really exciting, even though it was a lot more hassle in those days. For one thing you had to catch the bus. Today you just jump in the car and you are there in 15 minutes. None-the-less, heading off to Douglas on the bus as a kid with Mother and my brothers was a really exciting adventure. The bus itself was an exciting mode of transport. There was a unique smell about those route master busses. Maybe it was the paper in the conductor's ticket machine, and the carpeted seats. Once in Douglas, Woolworth's was an absolute heaven, the greatest toy shop in the world. It was even more special if you had an Aunt Trudy working on the sweet counter. I wonder can you still be prosecuted 45 years on? Well she didn't really nick the sweets; it was just that the scales didn't always work properly and gave half a pound instead of a quarter. Still I guess that when the accountants got round to doing the annual accounts for Woolies, they didn't notice the few pounds of sweets my Aunty Trudy had mislaid throughout the year. To a kid that grew up in Castletown, Douglas was exciting, busy and vibrant. If you were there at 8.55 or 2.55, you would hear the Isle of Man Steam Packet vessel blowing her whistle to either announce her departure or arrival from Liverpool. You seldom hear the Ben My Chree blow her whistle these days. If going to Douglas once a month was a treat for me, then for some folks on this Island it was a once in a lifetime experience. When we lived in St.Johns in the late 80's, I once met a chap who was standing outside the village shop, and he told me he had not been to Douglas since 1938. I even met a chap in Bride who told me he had not been in to Ramsey for 5 years. I myself, have never been abroad, apart from a day trip to Norway. I know of one certain gentleman who lives in Port Grenaugh who has never left the Island, and it's not Donald Gelling. A neighbour of mine back in the 60's had supported Everton all his life, so one day he decided he would sail across to Liverpool on a day trip and watch them play at Goodison Park. When

poor old Ned arrived there, he decided he didn't like it very much and tried to leave the ground. The only trouble was that 45,000 people were traveling in the opposite direction. Ned returned home to Castletown safely on the boat and for the rest of his life he confined his sporting aspirations to turning out for the Duck's Nest dart team on Tuesday nights.

I spent 11 years of my young life in Liverpool, and much of that time was spent watching the ships on the banks of the Mersey. Now, just like my neighbour Ned, I am happy to confine myself to walking the banks of the Silverburn.

This is Tom Glassey, reminiscing on a bitterly cold October day, on the banks of the Silverburn River.

October 28, 2008

It's quite common today to come across deal from retailers offering money back within 30 days if you are not happy with the product. The shrewd old Manxies would never pay for anything unless they had tried it out and were 100% certain it did the job. George Rudd was one such shrewd Manx farmer. I am told that George was so strong he could pick up a pony under each arm. Anyway one day George was due to go and collect his new set of false teeth from the dentist. The dentist got a little more than he bargained for though. After fitting George's nashers, George remained in the chair. George had brought with him a packet of digestive biscuits, and munched through at least four of them before proclaiming the teeth to be satisfactory. I suppose that is a bit like going in to a sweet shop and buying a box of chocolates, but insisting on eating half the top layer before you decide whether to buy them or not.

I remember George sitting in our front room in our house on Janet's Corner. He was rather concerned about the youth of the day. "Tom," said George "One of these days I will be sitting here looking out of your front window, and the bloody telephone box will go down the road in a wheel barrow yesser!" I almost felt like getting the lads together to make sure it happened. As far as I know, the phone box at Janet's Corner is still there, but sadly George is no longer with us. What a shame they don't have phone boxes where George is now. One day your prediction will come true George, however, it won't be a bunch of youngsters that cart the telephone box off in a wheelbarrow. It will be Manx telecom.

Well, I am now about to walk Skipper in the rain and cold. Hopefully I will be back tomorrow.

October 29, 2008

I was thinking last night about some of the folks I have met down through the years, and whether I had an inspirational effect or a negative effect on them the first time I met them.

Well, there is one guy who comes to mind that I definitely had a disastrous effect on the first time we met. I know this because I heard him say as much. In the mid 80's I worked on a log splitter with my Dad. I would go out to Derbyhaven to the log-splitting shed and split logs using a log splitting machine during the mornings. In the afternoons I would often take a gander down to the George Hotel and have a few pints. One day I finished splitting logs and took myself off to the George. I got talking to a Dutchman who had just arrived on the island. He told me he was booked in at the Golf Links Hotel. Anyway one thing led to another and me and my new Dutch friend downed several pints. I guess we got a little carried away and I stayed longer than I would have normally done. By teatime my Dutch friend was rather the worse for wear. So, I ordered him a taxi and sent him on his way to the Golf Links Hotel. The following day, after I had finished log splitting, I made my way down to the George as usual. I sat myself down on a stool at the bar, and with hardly anyone in the bar it was easy for me to hear the voice coming from the other side of the wall where the public telephone was. The Dutchman was obviously telling someone somewhere that he had arrived on the Isle of Man and how he was getting on. At one point in his conversation he paused for breath before belting out. "Yes, but you don't understand, I went in to pub and met a blind man and then disaster happened!" When the door finally opened and the Dutchman returned to the bar from his telephone chat, he gasped and let burst with, "Oh no, not again, not the blind man!" Well I guess we all need our excuses in life. On this occasion I only had a couple and left the Dutchman chatting up the barmaid. I guess he was still there several hours later, and I would not mind a small bet on the side that a similar telephone conversation may well have taken place the following day which blamed the blind man. In fact I wonder just how many binges I was responsible for during our Dutch friend's stay.

October 30, 2008

I have just completed one lap of Poulson Park. This is the first time I have walked Skipper for 2 or 3 weeks. I know I have suggested in other blogs that I was about to take Skipper out, but I didn't actually manage it. I have been lumbered with pleurisy, which has very much restricted what I have been able to do. Well, at least I seem to be over the worst of it now. This time last year, I had just packed in smoking. My cough was getting worse and I was becoming breathless even when out on short walks. I was starting to fear the worst. However, I had always told myself that I would pack in smoking as soon as the first signs of cancer came along. Great idea being as I didn't even know what the signs of cancer was. I visited my doctor, who told me I had something called COPD, and with a bit of medication and exercise I would be fine. COPD it seems as a condition a lot of smokers end up with. Apart from other things, it narrows the airways and makes it difficult to breathe. Anyway my condition worsened and within 3 months I was right in the proverbial with lung cancer. I had a rotten Christmas although I didn't know at that time I had lung cancer. I could hardly get up and down the stairs and life in general was a struggle. February and March proved to be the darkest days of my life. I had very little hope, and I was sailing fast towards death and Easter not knowing which would come first. More consultants, chemotherapy, radiation treatment and family and friends pulling together encouraging me to fight on, eventually plucked me from those dark days. Today, the sun shines, I am filled with hope, and I look forward to the future. It does not have to be a bright future, I am simply grateful to have a future to look forward to. I am not living on borrowed time as no one said I have to give it back. Life means so much more to me these days, having almost lost it. I live in a beautiful world, but what a shame it took lung cancer to make me fully appreciate it. I have been very fortunate in that I have a wonderful wife to stand beside me and fight the battle against cancer with me. I can't imagine how difficult this battle must be for those of you who have to face this terrible ordeal alone.

All over the world people are facing up to terrible ordeals, war, poverty, and dreadful diseases. Many of them will not even have basic medical support. At present we are concerned because our banks are in chaos and we are facing what we call or believe to be difficult times. A banking crisis is nothing compared to the suffering many people around the world are enduring. I have been extremely lucky; I was simply born in the right place. My ordeal has made me so much more grateful for everything I have. But more importantly I feel so much now for the poor sods in other parts of the world, which are not so lucky. I guess they probably don't believe that it is a beautiful world. But then what do we mean by a beautiful world, probably as far as the eye can see.

October 31, 2008

Hop Tu Naa has come round again. Well I hope the kids turn up tonight with a turnip and witches outfit. They will get no money from me if they don't. I hope this stupid Trick or Treat lark has now gone back to America and never given a passport to roam again. I note that over in the UK, they are now calling tonight Mischief Night. Extra police are on duty and what have you. I don't know where Mischief Night originates from but, it sounds even worse than Trick or Treat. Let's hope that our good old Manx tradition of Hop Tu Naa is the only song that is sung tonight. I have my bag of money ready in the window by the front door, and I shall only be dipping into it for Hop Tu Naaers.

On Wednesday it is Bonfire Night of course. I have never really been able to work out if the Brits celebrate the fact that Guy Fawks failed to blow up Parliament, or the fact that he tried to.

I am having a problem trying to get my head around this money problem at present. The banks are going to the wall. People are losing their jobs, and mortgages are up the creek. Yet, tomorrow night a bunch of English Cricketers will take on the West Indies in a winners take all match for half a million quid. As if that isn't enough, the BBC pay a guy who leaves insulting messages on an old man's answering machine, and then broadcasts the insulting message to the entire nation, 6 million quid a year. The BBC says this Jonathan Ross guy has a huge audience. I wouldn't call 2 million out of 60 million that damn huge. Anyway it seems to me, that if this guy is on 6 million a year and a bunch of Cricketers are going to earn half a million quid for playing a game of Cricket, there is plenty of money sloshing around in the world. It's just that the majority of it seems to be in the hands of fruitcakes.

OK then folks, that's enough from me for now. I shall be back on Monday, God willing, and even if He isn't all that willing, hopefully I'll still be back on Monday.

November 3, 2008

Good morning people. Well it's sure a wonderful feeling to feel good on a Monday morning. When you have retired or had to give up work for whatever reason, Monday mornings are much more welcome that they used to be.

Now then, imagine you are standing in your kitchen, looking out of the window, when you spot a motorcar crashing through your fence before finally coming to a stand still on your lawn. Then as if that is not enough, you discover that the driver is a 6-year-old child. Well that is what happened to my brother yesterday afternoon. The incident was followed by my brother and the child's parents having a very interesting discussion.

I heard a something on the radio on Saturday morning about life's anomalies so I thought, yes! I bet there are loads of them out there. After writing this blog for nearly a year, you sort of get to know who to approach for information when you need it. So, I am not that surprised to receive over 300 anomalies from around the world.

I include a small sample of them.

Why is it called the rush hour when no one is going anywhere?

Telephones, why are wrong numbers never engaged?

Why do we say things such as, I'm sure I put my specs in my pocket, when we obviously didn't?

What is good about Good Friday?

How can we be overwhelmed, underwhelmed, but never just whelmed?

Why are dogs that rely on having really good eyesight in order to guide people about, referred to as blind dogs?

How can anything be dead good?

Why does my nose run, and my feet smell?

If Fairy liquid cleans dishes, why do my tea towels get dirty?

I have yet to come across a house that got on well with a fire.

In hospital terms, why does he or she is 'comfortable', usually mean they could snuff it at any time!

Why are boxing rings square?

Why do you fill out a form by filling it in?

Why are they called apartments when they are all stuck together?

Why are there Braille signs on drive up cash machines?

What is a free gift, aren't all gifts free?

If olive oil comes from olives, where does baby oil come from?

How can you have a deafening silence?

November 4, 2008

Well today is a very big day 3,000 miles away across the pond. I must say though, an American election seems to last for as long as the term of office. In two years time they will begin this entire lark all over again. Well this election has probably been more exciting than recent ones. However, I wonder if in four years time there will be any Americans saying "Thank goodness for Obama," or "Thank God for McCain, my life has really improved since his election." I very

much doubt it.

Tomorrow is bomb fire night, and after that of course it's full steam ahead to Christmas. I bet the Christmas music is already being pumped through the streets of Douglas. I heard on the wireless this morning that a council in South Wales has been found in breech of new health and safety regulations and have been told they cannot put up their own Christmas trees and decorations, at least not by using a ladder. They now have to bring in contractors who will have to use cherry pickers. I suppose its only a question of time before Father Christmas, has to be a half cast, bisexual, and referred to as a Christmas Parent! Well before we reach that stage, enjoy your fireworks tomorrow. It is only a question of time before health and safety catch up with you.

November 5, 2008

Well what a momentous day. I do believe that as a result of the election in America yesterday, the World today is a safer place. In my opinion for what it is worth, America has given the world a friend, someone that will at least talk openly and honestly, as opposed to someone who talks from behind a cruise missile. I was very impressed with John McCain though. He behaved like a gentleman all the way through. Maybe he was a tad too much of a gentleman at times. However, at 72 his time had probably passed him by.

Well here we go again people, its fireworks time once again. When I was a kid I was always back at the convent in Liverpool for Bonfire Night after spending the weekend at home for half term. In those days we had sparklers, bangers, ripraps, Catherine wheels and rockets. I hate to think what they have today, probably nuclear missiles and cluster bombs. Well it certainly sounds like that listening to the racket that goes on just outside my house. Once today is out of the way, its full steam ahead for Christmas.

We always had a Christmas party at the convent. However, for economic reasons we joined with the local comprehensive school down the road. The nuns always drummed into us to be grateful for whatever we received. Yes I even had to pretend to be grateful for my torch given to me by Father Christmas at the party. I think the organizers forgot that half the kids were blind and didn't make any allowances when buying the toys. The trouble is, in a blind school, who the hell are you going to swap a flippin' torch with! It wasn't just torches for Christmas either that gave me a problem. The nuns had a weird sense of humour or sense of prospective. I didn't find having to sit for 2 bloody hours through a silent movie much fun. That was the nun's idea of a treat for the kids on a Saturday afternoon. Afternoons spent in an art gallery did not go down a wow either.

Okay folks it is now time for me to slink off down stairs again. I have not included my Manx tails article this month, as I attached it by mistake a couple of months ago.

Until tomorrow then people, enjoy the fireworks tonight and we shall meet again same place, same time tomorrow.

November 6, 2008

Well bonfire night is out of the way for another year, although the fireworks seem to get louder and louder each year. For a while I thought Saddam Hussein was in my front garden. However, we move on to the next date that is marked down in the calendar. This of course is November 11th, Remembrance Day where we remember all those who gave their lives so that we can be free. Many of us wear the poppy. In my school days, spent in a Catholic convent in Liverpool, we were all given crucifixes on a chain to wear round our necks. This was to remind us that Jesus Christ died for us on a cross. The Christian church decided that because it could not accurately date the crucifixion, it would steal the pagan feast of Easter. This is why we have Good Friday falling on a different date each year. Originally Good Friday was the day on which the moon was worshiped. It was always the nearest Friday to the full moon.

Anyway that is a very long time ago, back to the nuns at St. Vincent's. Just before Easter, a very large crucifix was erected just outside the school chapel in the porch-way. In letters large enough for blind kids to feel and read, an inscription above the cross read, "Remember, Jesus Christ died for you!" Looking back now I believe there should also have been an image of a dying soldier along side that cross, with an inscription that might have read. "So did I!"

We were never given poppies at school that I remember. The nuns were quite right to mark and remember the fact that Jesus Christ died for them. However, he was not the only one to make the ultimate sacrifice. Thousands and thousands of soldiers, sailors, and airman gave their lives so that the nuns could be free to follow their religion, and so that all of us can be free from tyranny.

Tom Glassey, on the banks of the Silverburn River, breathing the air of freedom sacrificed by the last breath of all those brave men and women that fell.

November 7, 2008

The name George Freestone will not be familiar to most of you. He neither sought, nor did he gain fame. George is one of the kindest men I ever met. When I was a kid, whenever he saw me in the street he would thrust his hand in to his pocket and hand me a two-shilling piece, or if he had had a good week, half a crown. George was a bricklayer by trade. Anyone meeting George for the first time would probably not be over whelmed by his personality. However, they would be struck by the fact that they had just met an extremely nice gentleman. Not long after I had published my book, George stopped me in the street one day. He told me he had written a small book about his neighbours and wanted me to read it and give him my opinion. The book turned out to be several sheets of paper on which George had written the names of everyone that lived in his street and the surrounding area. It really amounted to a list of names and occupations. None-the-less, all these people had made such an impact on George that he had remembered them and had taken the trouble to write their names down and a few lines about them. Since then, Castletown Heritage has used George's recollections and have ensured that they are kept for posterity. Just a couple of years ago, I was sitting in the hair dressers having my hair cut, when George arrived, assisting an old lady in to the shop, and calling back to collect her later. He was getting old himself then but was still helping other folk out whenever he could. George typifies that old saying. "It's nice to be important but it's much more important to be nice!" When I stop and think about all the famous people I have admired, footballers, singers and so on, of course I only remember them with regards to their profession; i.e. goals scored, records made, speeches by politicians. I think George is much more worthy. I remember him simply for being kind and nice. Yes, if I had a hall of fame, pride of place amongst the footballers, pop stars and writers, would be that wonderful gentle and kindhearted builder, George Freestone.

November 14, 2008

Hi Folks! Well this is my first blog this week. I'm sorry about that. For one reason or another I just didn't get around to blogging.

Well we had an eventful period last night as we hit the sack. Our bedroom looks out over the Silverburn River. The Silverburn is hardly a hive of activity during the daytime let alone in the pitch-black night. It's normal for us to hear kids larking about, but mostly during the summer months. Last night loud screams for help came up from the river and so Barbara quickly dressed and went down to the river to see what she could do. I called the police and before long it emerged that a young woman had fallen into the river. By the time Barbara arrived on the scene two lads had come to the young lady's aid and helped her out of the water. She was obviously wet through and extremely cold. She had chosen the deepest part of the river to fall into and highest drop from the bank. Anyway Barbara got her into our car to take her home and by the time Babs returned to the car after fetching the keys from the house, the young lady had absconded. We never saw her again, and the police called this morning to tell us, the lady concerned is OK and back home again. Well another amazing thing about this young lady was that at the time she fell in to the river, she was clutching a carrier bag containing four tins of lager. She still had hold of the bag when she was fished out of the river. She had inhaled a fair bit of river as well, which is why the police spent a fair bit of the night trying to trace her to make sure she was ok. Barbara has just fished the girl's mobile phone out of the river and the Lord only knows what other personal belongings are still in the water. Anyway it's heartening to know that some folks never loose their priorities. Even though she must have been absolutely freezing cold, and probably in the water for 5 or 10 minutes, she still hung on to her four cans of lager.

Last week I told you the story of George Freestone. One of the kindest men I have ever met. Well someone contacted me to tell me of an incident concerning George. It seems that around one Christmas time, George and his mates were at work on a building site. When the men received their pay, George approached a work mate that George knew had a large family and gave the man half of his wages. "Take this money," said George, "for you have many kids and I have only two."

What a truly wonderful man!

Well that is it then people until Monday.

This is Tom Glassey on, and not in the Silverburn River.

November 17, 2008

Good morning people, well Christmas is now only 5 weeks away. For those of you who hate Christmas, there is always Boxing Day. You will love Boxing Day because it is the longest time until the next Christmas.

I am glad to report that we got through the weekend without having to drag anyone out of the river. Our rescued friend paid us a couple of visits on Friday. She explained that she had been to see her MHK to ask for a fence to be erected along the riverbank and lights to be installed. I hope he told her that it would be a lot simpler and cheaper if she didn't go wandering around down on the riverbank in the dead of night.

Don't they get worked up across the water regarding their nancy footballers in the premiership? Apparently someone in the crowd chucked a coin at one of the Chelsea players. The player picked it up and promptly chucked it back. He might receive 40 lashes and go to prison for 10 years. Blimey! I remember a match between Peel and Ramsey, where the players joined forces with the crowd and threw the referee into the river. As far as I know, nothing happened to anyone. On another occasion, once again in a match between Peel and Ramsey, the ref's changing hut was set on fire, no one even bothered to call the fire brigade. In one of Malew's matches their goalkeeper, Herbie Nelson was once sent off for foul play. The trouble was that Herbie actually owned the field the match was being played on, and informed the referee, that if he couldn't play, then no one else was going to either, including the referee. They do seem to make mountains from molehills across the water. I am surprised that any of the crowd has any coins to chuck once they have made the extortionate admission fees.

Well folks that completes my rant for today. I am of course on the banks of the Silverburn, and coping very well without fences and lights.

November 18, 2008

I heard on the radio yesterday, that a group of youngsters in the Midlands have been prevented by the local council, from singing carols and taking mince pies to an old folk's home, on health and safety grounds. I also heard about a special training centre for Father Christmases. Yes, it appears that the large department stores are sending their Father Christmases on courses. I wouldn't be surprised if it's not possible to gain a university degree in Christmas. In fact in a couple of years it will probably be compulsory to be fully qualified with a Santa Claus degree in order to hand out bags of sweets and balloons in Woollies. Of course we all know that there is only one Father Christmas who lives in Iceland. Let us hope that he did not have his bank account with Singer and Friedlander.

I have been following the case of little Anna Jones, who at the age of 13, having been treated for cancer with chemotherapy and radiotherapy, decided that enough was enough when her only option left was to have a heart transplant. Anna simply decided for herself that she had had enough and now just wanted to remain at home and see out whatever time she has left with her family. The authorities intervened and tried to force young Anna to have the operation against her will and were going to take her away from her parents who were supporting Anna's wishes. Thankfully these morons did not get their way and Anna is now back at home with her parents, having spent large chunks of her 13 years in Hospital. Anna unfortunately won't be getting what she wants for Christmas unless God himself intervenes. None-the-less she has given all of us a very special Christmas present. She has melted away all of our problems in as much as compared to Anna's situation, our problems are minor. What a very special little girl.

November 19, 2008

I am told that today is world toilet day, and appropriately I will be relaying a story regarding a toilet matter later in this blog.

I have always been fond of the odd practical joke. Down through the years I have been the perpetrator, and on the

receiving end of many. Providing no one gets hurt, or humiliated, a good gut wrenching laugh is what most of us need to deal with the more serious aspects of life. Of course some people simply don't have a sense of humour. It's no different to being blind or deaf, it's simply a disability. I'm not sure if it should qualify you for a disabled car sticker, or indeed incapacity benefit, but I'm sure it must be a struggle trying to get through life without it. Nuns don't appear to have much of a sense of humour as I found to my cost during my 11 years spent at the convent in Liverpool. They certainly did not appreciate the time I dressed up a life size statue of St. Dominic in his Sunday best and stood him next to the snooker table with a cue in his hand and a fag sticking out of his mouth. Mind you, thinking back I guess the nuns must have some kind of humour, otherwise what the hell was a snooker table doing in the playroom of a blind school? They also were not amused the time I filled the back of the piano with snow in the assembly hall.

My friends and family have always known that I am something of a radio buff. They would often drop by so that they could listen to ships, aircraft or whatever else I could find for them. One day the milkman called. I had just turned on the radio and was listening to a play on Radio Four. The play was about an aircraft where the pilot had taken a heart attack and one of the passengers had taken over the controls and was being talked down by the control tower. The milkman knowing I tuned into ships and aircraft on my VHF radio, sat down and was going nowhere until the drama ended. He sat on our sofa hardly able to believe what he was hearing. Unfortunately some 45 minutes later I did not get my hand to the off switch quickly enough, and a BBC announcer blabbed out my secret. The milkman slammed out of the front door almost smashing the window in the door, cursing and swearing and late with his deliveries. On another occasion I was listening to a comic play on the same radio station. The play was about horse racing. As I listened my Auntie Marie turned up and plonked herself down. "So, listening to the horse racing are we," she said. At the end of the play the commentator describing the end of the race announced that, Black Magic won the 3:30 at Chester, but then carried on galloping, and went on to win the 5:30 at Haydock. I can still hear my Auntie Marie's gasps of disbelief. "Some flaming horse that one," she yelled as she made her way to the kettle. As far as I know she still believes that Black Magic is the only horse ever to win two races on two different racecourses in the same day.

Now at the beginning I told you that today is national world toilet day. Well according to 5 Live at any rate. So, I close today with a toilet story.

My dear friend and neighbour George was a simple man. He emptied coal boats with my father and worked on building sites in between times. He gave most of his wages away. He was kindness itself. One day on the building site George fell in need of a poo. So, he took himself off behind a hedge and pulled his trousers down. One of his workmates observing George from a distance decided to have a bit of fun, and so as George took the strain his workmate held a shovel under George's backside and removed the poo. When George had finished, he pulled up his trousers and could not believe his eyes, he knew he'd done one, yet there was no sign of it what-so-ever. George slinked his way back to work and completed the rest of his day a worried man. As soon as 5o'clock came round George took himself off to the doctors. He explained to the doctor that he could feel his poo coming, and he was certain to all extent and purposes he had done it yet there was absolutely nothing to show for it. I won't go into the treatment dished out by the doctor for George. Let's just say that George spent a considerable part of the following day on the toilet.

Well tomorrow I will have more practical joke stories for you.

November 20, 2008

The Blackpool comedian Eddie Gray was a great practical joker. He once began talking into a letterbox in the street. When a crowd had gathered, he called into the letterbox in a loud voice. "Well how the hell did you get in there in the first place?" When the police turned up, he just sidled off leaving the police and the crowd shouting in to an empty letterbox. On another occasion he found himself in London and at a loose end. Clutching a length of rope, he walked up to a suited gentleman and explained that he was an architect and would the gentleman please help him by holding the end of this rope. He explained that he was going to nip around the corner of the building and when he pulled on the rope, it would be most helpful if the gentleman could pull on his end as hard as possible. Eddie disappeared around the corner and spun the exact same story to another similarly clad gentleman. He then crossed the road and watched the two strangers straining and pulling their guts out on each end of his rope.

Many years ago Alan Jackson, now with radio Merseyside, used to host the Mannin Line on Manx radio. I have never believed in the flying saucer theories and one day decided to prove it. I called the Mannin Line and explained that I had seen a flying saucer the previous night out at Derbyhaven. I kept to the standard descriptions, cigar shaped, and with flashing orange lights. Alan of course showed great interest and before long quite a number of callers were calling in to say they had seen it as well. Right near the end of the programme some sod from Ballasalla called in and said, "Now just hold a minute yessir! That guy who first phoned in about this flying saucer lark, sounded very much like Tom Glassey from Castletown to me, and he is as blind as a bat!"

Sometimes I think life itself is one big practical joke. I am not sure who is laughing loudest or indeed who has the last laugh. However, there is usually a funny side to everything. Sometimes it can take a long time to find it and sometimes we might not find it at all. I have spent most of my life laughing. Yes for sure, the laughter stopped for a while last January when I was told I had terminal cancer, but now some 8 or 9 months on, the tears have turned back to laughter once again. I thought my laughing days were over, but I was wrong again. It's difficult to laugh at cancer. However, every time you manage a smile or a laugh, you do serious damage to its armour. No, you can't simply laugh your way out of cancer. However, laughter is the best medicine and cancer doesn't like it. With love and laughter we can conquer all evil, if we only had enough of it!

November 21, 2008

I see there is a vote running on the forum at present. You can vote for the best blog, best joke, best thread, best insult etc. Just about anything. I'm sure our good friend Keyboarder will be right up there for best troll. Because of the Internet, we can now insult people from just about any corner of the world. Our insults can travel thousands of miles, and of course we can insult a lot more people at the stroke of a few keys. Winston Churchill and George Bernard Shaw did not have the benefit of the Internet to insult each other, or for that matter to insult the masses. However, the quality of their insults was such that they have stood the test of time, and I am sure they are posted on many websites around the world. My favourite insults from these two gentlemen came in the form of two letters that were exchanged between the two of them. Shaw wrote to Churchill inviting Churchill to the opening night of his latest play. Shaw closed his letter with the words. "Please bring a friend, if you have one!" to which Churchill replied. "Sorry old bean I can't come to your opening night. However, I will come to the second night if there is one!"

Not many people manage to insult an entire nation. However, Bernard Shaw managed to insult the entire British nation

with this insult. “God will never allow the sun to set on the British Empire, because no one could ever trust them in the dark!” When Margaret Thatcher was asked for her opinion of Ted Heath, she replied. “I refuse to speak ill of the undead!” I am not really sure if that is an insult or not.

My Dad once, whilst discharging a coal boat with a colleague who was not pulling his weight told him, “If you were cold, you would be too bloody lazy to shiver!”

An old Manx farmer, who had never married, was asked as to why he had not married. He replied. “I would rather go through life, wanting something I didn’t have, than having something I didn’t want!”

I’m not sure if this is an insult to women in general, or a compliment. An American film star once said, “There is no doubt in my mind that women are the best housekeepers. So far, I have been divorced 6 times, and every time she kept the house!”

Well, I guess Christmas is not the time of year to be trading insults. So, I shall retreat now to the banks of the Silverburn, and dream up something more appropriate for tomorrow’s blog.

Tom Glassey, on the banks of the Silverburn, deep in thought!

November 24, 2008

Last Thursday I heard that they were going to knock down Mother and Father’s old house situated on Janet’s Corner the following day. Yesterday I called round there to check it out. Sure enough, the old house on James Road had been reduced to a pile of rubble. The 4-bedroom house and the one next door have been flattened to make way for an old folk’s complex. I don’t have a problem in making way for the future. Isn’t that what we all do at the end of the day? We are simply here to mind space. It doesn’t prevent me from becoming nostalgic though. As I sat in the car outside our old house I couldn’t help thinking of my old Dad. The endless hours and hours of work he had put into the garden. He won the Castletown garden of the year award no fewer than 6 times. Dad died last April and now it seemed that all reminders of him were slowly being destroyed as well. Strangely enough, amongst the entire rubble one rose tree stood alone. It was almost as if it was making a last stand against progress. It seems as if someone has been following Dad through life, making sure that as soon as he moves on, all reminders of his presence have to be removed. He spent 15 years stoking in Castletown gasworks. The gasworks was later flattened and is now the Commissioner’s yard. The coal boats he discharged in Castletown harbour are all gone. Now the old house has gone as well. I wonder how long the rose tree will stand defiant! All that is left now are memories. However, they will last forever. No one can, or will even try to flatten my memories. Life goes on, but sometimes pauses just long enough for us to shed a tear for yesterday, and then gather our hopes for tomorrow.

November 27, 2008

Will We Get Home Sick In Heaven

Will we get home sick in Heaven; will we miss our family and friends?
Can you get Sky on the telly and never need money to spend?
Are the houses all built by Dandara, or does everyone live in a tent.
If you can't pay a Heavenly mortgage, does God call around for his rent?

Can you live on a beautiful Island and be as free as the sweet mountain air.
Is the Government caring and sharing, or is the system just as unfair.
Is the Government made up of angels, all hanging their heads in despair?
As old by gone members of Tynwald, are now raking havoc up there.

Are there busses from Heaven to Hell? Can you get there by boat or by plane?
Or is the Steam Packet running the Seacat and canceling sailings again?
Is it hard to keep warm in the winter, while the fires in Hell are a blaze?
Have the seats all gone round the fire, to the deemsters and bent MHK'S?

Is food expensive in Heaven, it will all seem so bloody unfair,
If Shoprite have cornered the market, and opened their branches up there!
Our shares are not worth a carrot and our bank accounts empty and bare,
Because Woolies and Singer and Friedlander, have moved all their assets up there.

So will I be home sick in Heaven; when I reach my pad in the sky?
Will all my troubles be history, or am I in for a shock when I die?
Just what can you do up in Heaven, when you're all screwed up in your head,
And suicide isn't an option, well not when you're already dead.

So will I be home sick in Heaven, is the landscape as Manx as the hills?
Will the salt air blow in from the ocean and my lungs with it’s perfume it fills?
Or will fences block off my pathway, with notices making it clear.
Reserved for Jeremy Clarkson, no further access from here!

So I'll do a deal with the devil, and continue with my sinful ways.
But I know I am bound for Heaven, to spend the rest of my days.
As there's a sign on the gateway to Hell, and in big block letters it says,
Sorry we are full up to bursting, with bishops and bent MHK'S.

Tom Glassey. On the banks of the Silverburn River.

November 28, 2008

Well yesterday's poem brought the biggest reaction from you since I began the blog last February. Today is going to be an exciting day. No idea why, I just know that it is. I shall be off to walk Skipper in the next half hour or so. Then we are off on a tour of a few shops that hopefully will take Barbara's latest prints. It’s time we discovered for ourselves whether the credit crunch has hit the Isle of Man yet. No sign of it having any effect in Castletown so far. Christmas card writing

has got to be one of the biggest chores of the year. I think its time we put a stop to it. So, here is my parting shot!

This Christmas card writing's the pits.
I have totally knackered my wrist.
So no bloody fear, instead of writing next year, I'll go down to the pub and get pissed.

Well I said earlier that I didn't think the credit crunch had hit Castletown yet. None-the-less, it has hit your's truly, so here is my Christmas card to all for this year:

"Things are tight, and times are hard, so, here's your bloody Christmas card."

December 1, 2008

There is a deep frost this morning. So, who is kidding whom with this global warming lark? Our summer was no big deal, and it's not normally this cold in November. Of course the scientists and politicians all believe that global warming is taking place. But that is because they keep holding all seminars on the subject in places such as the Caribbean and such places. They don't need to go gallivanting around the World in order to spout their rubbish. I shall send them my oil bills, but somehow I doubt that they will read them.

When I was a kid, Sundays were pretty boring affairs. At school we had to don our best clothes, attend Mass, sit around the playrooms and do lots of praying. At home it was a different matter. In the summer we would walk up to Silverdale along the Silverburn River. Once there, we spent our time riding the water powered horses and mucking about on the boating lake. In those days the guy who looked after the boating lake didn't have to have been a lifeguard with more than 10 years experience, have served on the lifeboat for a minimum of 5 years or don an Arctic survival suit whilst on duty. During the winter the pubs would close on Sundays, so everyone sat around being thoroughly miserable. In wintertime the Isle of Man was not a fun place to be. There were no pubs open, no shops open and even the boats didn't sail.

Now for an update on the rose bush! You will be pleased to know that we did go and rescue the rose from the garden of Dad's old house. It has now been replanted in the garden of the bungalow where he ended his days. Last year I did not have a fun Christmas. On checking Barbara's diary, at this time I was pretty much confined to bed. Christmas was looming but I can't say I was very excited about it. Mother and Father both came for Christmas lunch. I couldn't help wondering during the meal though, was this going to be my last Christmas. Dad seemed to be in good spirits. There was no sign then that in fact this was to be Dad's last Christmas, and I would go on to make something of a recovery. It has been a long and difficult year. I am grateful to be approaching Christmas in reasonable health. I would be lying if I said I was really excited about it. None-the-less my spirits are high, as just like the rose, I have been given a second chance.

December 2, 2008

As I sit in this office this morning, I am counting my blessings. This time last year I had not started the blog. I knew I was very ill and that my situation was worse than the doctors were indicating. Things just went from bad to worse from then on. By January I had the scans and the proof that cancer was now infesting my lungs. I didn't really need my doctor to tell me that there was probably not a lot that could be done for me. I began my ordeal by sitting around feeling sorry for myself with lots of tears and a feeling of absolute hopelessness. Later in January, Dr Jones stepped in to my life and shone his light deep into my dark tunnel. He convinced me that there was a real chance of me making a recovery, and I left his surgery in Nobles, and headed home with some real if not slender hope. At last I had something to cling to, just a grain of hope but none-the-less I had my finger tips on the safety rail. Life is very much like a pack of cards. You can only play your hand. Knowing when to stick and when to twist can and often does seal your fate. When you are not sure when to hold, and when to twist, that is when your friends can prove their worth. But life is not about just one single game of cards. It's about lots of games. Just because you didn't fair to well with your deal, doesn't mean you won't get a better deal next time round. When I first began blogging last March my fate was still very uncertain. I think it was my wife Barbara who talked me into writing a blog. The thought at that time of sharing my depressing life with the rest of the World, did not appeal to me at all. I recall sitting up here in this office in those early days of blogging bashing away at the keyboard often with tears in my eyes. Skipper, my one-year-old, pain-in-the bum Collie, as far as everyone else is concerned, became an integral part of my recovery. So many times he would pad his way in to my office and sit by my side with his head in my lap. It was almost as if he was saying, "I will never give up on you Dad." The idea that Skipper was going to outlive me by many years played on my mind heavily. He started to follow me everywhere around the house. In fact if I wanted to locate Skipper at any time, all I had to do was stretch out my hand, and he would be within a couple of feet of me. Today, well Skipper has just left my office this minute. He potters in and out these days to say hello but no longer feels the need to shadow my every movement. As the days rolled by and my chemotherapy started, I became much more positive. Writing the blog renewed many of my old friends from the past, and introduced me to a whole pile of new friends from every corner of the globe. Some of them were in a worse situation than me, yet they remained full of hope and became an inspiration to me. The blog still very much reflects my state of mind on the day. If I am down, then it shows through in my writing. If I am happy, then like-wise. Since I began blogging, there have been around 20,000 hits on the blog. I am not sure in the greater scheme of things if that good or not. I guess we have built up around 100 regular readers. Of course if we include Manx Tails, then that number swells too many thousands. Blogging has played a huge part in my recovery. Simply getting things off my chest or taking other people with me on my journey to God knows where, has made my journey much more interesting, and not so lonesome. I am extremely grateful to you all for that. Today although I am certainly not yet back to full fitness, I am a million miles from where I was this time last year. I don't know what the future holds. I know that I was clear of cancer the last time I saw the specialist and I return again in January. I know that the cancer could strike again at anytime. The doctors have done a fantastic job. However, cancer if it chooses, can overwhelm us all. Should it return, I will be much better equipped to deal with it than last time around. At present I am grateful to breathe our sweet mountain air, to be able to walk the banks of the Silverburn River, to listen to the sound of the waves from Castletown Bay washing over the stones and to be able to listen to the birds each morning that begin every day with a song. I know that I have much to thank my wife Barbara for, and of course my family and friends. And last but definitely not least, Skipper. Down through the years I have had four very expensive guide dogs. I never imagined that a bit of a rag bag of a collie that cost not a penny from a farm in Kirk Michael, would play such an important role in dragging me out of those dark, dark days.

December 4, 2008

Its not just football and horse racing that are affected by the weather. Other pastimes such as blogging are affected also. I have not blogged for the last couple of days because at present we have no heating. It has simply been too cold to sit

in the office for very long. We still have no heating. We misread the gauge on the oil tank and allowed it to run out. Well Barbara didn't realize there was a little switch on the bottom that stops the level falling! This morning I was going to stay in bed until mid morning in an attempt to keep warm. However, boredom over came me and I have finally made my way into the office and I am now typing furiously in a bid to keep warm.

This week my old friend pleurisy has returned. Well at least it's a faithful pal and never stays away for to long. I am a right old whinge bag this morning. I'm thinking I might have turned in to Arsene Wenger over night. Having no heating this week has taken me back to my childhood on the Janet's Corner housing estate. We certainly had no central heating back in those days. I haven't coped nearly as well this week as we did then. We had just one open coal fire in the living room. When you woke up on a winter's morning there was often ice on the bedroom windows. We would dress in double quick time. The bathroom was an icebox. There would be no hot water first thing in the morning, as the fire had not been lit for long enough. I remember my two brothers racing up the stairs at break neck speed in a bid to have the only bath going, as one bath would drain the hot water tank, often only to find that I had already bathed earlier in the day and the hot water was gone. Later as young adults, Friday evenings were always something of a scramble. My two brothers and I would race home from work to grab the hot water. Whoever got there first also got the pick of the clothes and shoes. I usually got home last as working in Douglas put me at a disadvantage.

Well once again the cold has beaten me and I am going to have to leave this office. If a blog appears tomorrow, then that will mean the oilman has been.

Tom Glassey, on the banks of the icy Silverburn River.

December 5, 2008

Once again I'm here in a freezing office hoping an oil tanker will turn up this morning. Actually as I write the tanker has turned up, however the system still isn't working because we now need to wait for the plumber to arrive to bleed the tank.

I woke up this morning at 3am, and of course I have been awake since. I did have two very strange dreams though. In the first one I was on a plane flying to Liverpool, only not as a passenger, I was the pilot! During the flight one of the passengers asked me if the plane could fly as far as Russia. "Yes", I said and altered course for Russia. Unfortunately I must have taken a wrong turning along the way and ended up crashing the plane in Poland. Well nobody died although the passengers who had booked to fly to Liverpool were not best pleased. In my second dream, I came on as a substitute for Liverpool in an FA cup final at Wembley against Sunderland. There was only two minutes left when I came on and I never got a kick. None-the-less, no one was able to say I didn't play a blinder.

Now there are many ways of beating the system. Here are a couple. A chap in Northern Ireland had difficulty in getting the bin men to remove all his rubbish. He found having about six bins for various materials confusing, and often ended up placing rubbish in the wrong bins. That is until he had a brain wave. Once his dust bin became full, he wrapped the rest of his rubbish in fancy Christmas paper and some bugger nicked it every time.

Junk mail is a huge problem for many of us. A friend of mine in London got so fed up of the junk mail he was receiving that he took himself off to the local butcher, and got a load of chicken's guts. He then left the guts to rot for a couple of weeks before posting them back to his junk mail senders. It soon stopped.

Well the cold has beaten me once again so I am now off down stairs to the electric fire.

Tom Glassey, still freezing on the banks of the Silverburn River.

December 8, 2008

I guess people are starting to think about New Year's resolutions. I used to make them, but no more. I only ever kept one of them, and that was, never to make any more. I suppose most smokers will want to try and kick the habit, although I actually met someone the other day who told me he was going to start smoking on New Year's Eve. Well, I suppose there's one born every day. Talking of smoking, I heard on the radio that a bunch of medical scientists have discovered that smoking does more harm than was first thought. Well blimey! They have been saying for years that it kills you, so goodness only knows what it does now!

I wonder what reaction you would get if you approached an alien, and explained to him that "I am going to take this weed, mix it with some tar and then roll it in paper. I want you then to shove it in your mouth while I set fire to it!" Well that is exactly what I did for over 30 years. Smoking eventually led to me catching lung cancer. However, lung cancer led to me writing a blog, and through the blog I have formed a good relationship with folks all over the globe. Blimey, even lung cancer has a silver lining.

Now then, I hear that Father Christmas has sold his pad in Lapland and bought a house and grotto built by Dandara on Langness. The move is purely for tax purposes. Jeremy Clarkson is said to be furious because Santa's reindeers smashed down his fences and ate all his vegetables.

December 9, 2008

I hear on the radio this morning that a group of protesters have managed to get onto the runway at Stansted Airport and delay all the flights. I find it beyond belief that in these troubled times where you can't even smuggle a tube of tooth paste onto an aircraft, that somehow 54 protesters can get onto the main runway and erect a steel barrier across the runway. Does that simply confirm that airport security is, and always has been nothing more than a complete joke?

I also note that a bunch of psychologists have worked out that the best way to control weekend revelers is to issue the police with a carton of bubbles. Apparently, blowing bubbles in their faces produces a calming effect on them. It seems this half-baked idea is now being tried in Lancashire. I just can't imagine a 6 ft. 4 in. Bobby standing outside a dingy night club in downtown Blackburn, in front of a noisy rebellious mob, and blowing bubbles at them. I should think it would be more likely, that they will collapse in a fit of laughter.

Also folks, I hear that another bunch of lunatics calling themselves 'psychologists' have informed the education authorities that history and geography should be taken out of the school curriculum and replaced with lessons in how to teach happiness and health.

Well, if that's true I think all miserable people should be forced to attend night classes.

Now then people, I have decided to drastically reduce the blogging next year. I want to concentrate on writing another book and will only be able to blog very occasionally. I intend to keep the Manx Tails articles going and Barbara is going to begin a blog of her own so you will be still kept up to date with everything, and have a blog with a different slant on it. I will keep going until I have completed one year blogging regularly and as I started on the 21st February, so that will be the date I will regularly blog up too.

Until tomorrow then, this is Tom Glassey on the banks of the Silverburn River.

December 10, 2008

Blimey, it has taken me 24 hours to calm down after my experience yesterday. Barbara had an appointment at the breast-screening clinic. We set off armed with our letter, only to find on our arrival at Nobles we were at the wrong hospital. The breast-screening clinic is at the old Nobles hospital. Well sure enough it does give the address on the letter, but frankly when you see Nobles at the top of the letter, you assume it means the new hospital. What is the point in spending millions on a new hospital, then continuing some of the services in the old one, and calling both facilities by the same name? Only our dozy Government could pull a daft stunt like that. Well it gets worse. We then had to drive back to the old hospital with her appointment time past, so I rang the telephone number on the letter, which has a Government prefix 685. The girl who took my call did not appear to understand what I was on about. I explained to her what has happened and that we are now going to be 15 minutes late for the appointment. For some weird reason she asks me am I in Coventry. I say, why the hell I would be ringing you from Coventry regarding an appointment ten minutes ago at Nobles. I explained that we were at the Quarterbridge. She asked where the Quarterbridge was. I gasp with frustration. "You don't know where the Quarterbridge is!" She explained that she was in Northhampton in a call centre. Yes the bunch of lunatics running our health service has farmed out our telephone appointments to a call centre based in Northhampton. When we finally arrived at the old hospital, the lady on reception informed us that loads of folk are going to the wrong hospital, yet our health service still are not getting the message.

Well keeping on the health topic I want to conclude today with a little story about donors. Donor cards are back in the news again and whether we should carry them or not. I once spoke to an old lady on this subject, and this was her response. "When I die, they can have every part of my body that will be of any use to them. However, they can't have my heart, for I gave that to my husband over 40 years ago, and no one else can have it."

December 11, 2008

Sorry folks! I have just been listening to the radio and you know what that usually means? Yes there is a rant coming up. Apparently a school bus in America was evacuated and fumigated just because a peanut had been discovered on the bus. It seems 150 people die each year in the US through allergies, 100 people are struck by lightening, 1,550 are killed by bee stings and 10,000 people die in sports accidents. The US must be the only country in the world where folks might have a guilty conscience about having a jar of peanut butter in the food cupboard, however be perfectly happy about keeping a gun in the house. We mustn't get too smug in the UK or over here either. What happens in the US today tends to happen here sooner or later. I also hear that two kids in a school in the south of England were told when they got to school, that they had to wear gowns at school, just because they lived on a farm and might have come in to contact with milk. I haven't a clue what possible harm a bucket of milk might do and I don't want to know either. Peanuts and milk are harmful apparently, but Nuclear power stations and telephone masts are absolutely fine. Keep well away from milk and peanuts, but however, if you wish to maintain a healthy brain, stay even further away from the bloody fruitcakes in charge in our councils and civil service.

Gosh people I get so worked up these days. Froth comes out of my mouth, steam comes out of my ears and I start to shake all over and need to sit down and have a brandy. I am going to have to stop listening to the radio.

Now wife Barbara has asked me to try and find out what trolling means. I have come across it myself on the forum but I haven't a clue as to what it is. Answers please to tomglassey@manx.net

Today I made a start on my new book, which I have decided to call "On the Rocks." I now have 2000 words written so only about 78 000 or so to go.

I still have not managed to flog my boat. I am now down to 6,000 from 8,500. Well there is a credit crunch on. Someone called me last week and offered me a couple of thousand. I suggested it would be cheaper for him to have a day out on Silverdale Lake. "There is a credit crunch you know" he said. "Can you hear my teeth crunching?" I retorted. You just have to admire the bloody cheek of some Yorkshire folk.

Well folks that's enough from me for today.

December 12, 2008

I wonder how many of you will actually get what you really want for Christmas from friends and relatives. How many pairs of socks and hankie sets we all end up with? I have never actually met anyone who has asked for a pair of socks for Christmas. I have nipped in to David Collisters off license in Castletown and told him not to serve anyone with cheap brandy if they come into his shop trying to buy me a Christmas present. I have told David, if they are not buying a bottle of Cognac then tell them not to bother, go buy something else such as a pair of socks or a hankie from Audrey down the road.

We have just tucked into a load of Aussie biscuits and sweets thanks to the parcel that arrived yesterday from Adelaide. Thank you Janine, I know I can't email at present, as you are on passage to Tasmania but I will as soon as you return to Adelaide.

Well poor old Woollies is closing down after 99 years. At one time they had a rule that nothing in any of their branches cost more than sixpence. Today they seem to have made a rule that nothing in their shops cost under a tenner.

I haven't heard Father Christmas come round Castletown for a couple of years now. Arthur Vanwell used to come round in a sort of boat thing tossing oranges to us kids as he went on his way. We used to catch them and chuck them back.

Probably those health and safety fruitcakes have been up to their old tricks again and put a stop to him. Santa never actually came or had a grotto in any of the Castletown shops. Well the only toyshop was Peggy Waterson's on Bank hill, now known as 'Peggy's Hill'. There would not have been any room for him in there as every spare inch was taken up with stock, and even if he had managed to squeeze in there somewhere, she would have sold him within in first hour of trading.

That's it for today folks. I'm now going to take Skipper on a solo walk of the park whilst it is quiet.

December 14, 2008

My weekend has turned in to a bleak one. On Saturday I discovered a lump in my armpit. The lump is solid and of course it could be anything. None-the-less Monday I begin the week with a visit to the doctors, and no doubt be sent for x-rays and all those cancer tests to begin again. It was this time last year I was starting to think that I probably had lung cancer and Christmas was not exactly much fun. I wasn't expecting it to happen again this Christmas. The only difference this time is that I really don't know what the outcome is going to be. None-the-less I am probably going to have to put up with the uncertainty throughout this Christmas because I can't see any test results coming through before Christmas. Anyway whatever is coming my way, I am going to have to batten down the hatches and prepare the good ship "Tom Glassey" for yet another stormy sea. I have had a bit of a weep, but now I am feeling strong again.

December 16, 2008

Well folks, I have just returned from the doctors. The doctor couldn't tell me of course if my lump is malignant. She has referred me to the specialist whom I will see at Nobles on Thursday at 12o'clock.

Well it's presently Monday afternoon so that's not too long to wait. I shall now crack on with life and presume it is not cancer, and I shall remain in that frame of mind until such times as a consultant tells me it is, which of course may not be very long. Life is very much like a game of snakes and ladders. You keep climbing the ladders but sooner or later the dice throws you onto a bloody snake and down you go. The important thing is to make sure you climb back onto a ladder as quickly as possible. I am not in control of the dice or the shaker. I have absolutely no idea whether there is a God or not. But someone much more important and more powerful than us is throwing the dice. My good friend and blog reader Dorothy over in Liverpool has sent me an email on faith this morning. I enclose it for what it is worth at the end of this blog. I have faith, but in goodness knows what! I don't believe any of the recognized religions throughout the world have anything to offer me. For me they have brought far too much strife, death, wars and bitterness throughout history. You do not need a personal God in order to have faith.

Faith
When I am continuously being battered by the storms of life, and my very spirit is ebbing away, then all I need to do is hang onto that gift called 'Faith', that one support which will weather the storms. Faith does not depend on a clever head, only belief: belief in the self and the strength that lies within. Faith is the seed of victory and the foundation of making the impossible possible.

Until tomorrow then folks!

December 17, 2008

There is something very strange happening in the wild. The other day I heard birds twittering at 5:40 a.m. Today there was bird song at 4 a.m. Why are the birds suddenly singing in the pitch dark? Answers on a postcard please!

At present I can hear the children playing in the school playground across the road. Their shrilled and excited voices rise up into the sky and blend in with the birds chatter. The sky is full of happy sounds. It seems hard to imagine that these young kids will one day be old people that wither away and die. It makes me think how short and temporary this life of ours really is. It only seems as if it was five minutes ago that I was running around in a school playground myself. Yet, 50 years have gone by and what did I do with them? Time it seems to me is very much like money. You can have loads of it and when every penny is gone, you don't seem to have very much to show for it. Time is a great commodity. Your boss hasn't got enough of his own so he's happy to buy some of yours. Once you retire you will have all your time to spend on yourself, or so you might think. There is and will always be someone staking a claim to your time. Your kids have a great deal more of it than you. However, they still demand bloody great chunks of your time. The phrase "there's no time like the present" is very apt, because the past has gone, and the future is guaranteed to anybody. The present is all we have. Today is a blessing, and if tomorrow comes out, way it's a bonus! Well my time is up for today my friends so if I receive my bonus, I will be with you tomorrow.

December 18, 2008

I am not long back from the hospital. My news was not good I'm afraid. The doctor thinks cancer enjoyed my company so much last time that it has come back for another visit. I have to have a scan as soon as possible, then probably more chemo. After that, it's anyone's guess. Yes, I am a bit down in the dumps today, but that will not last. I just need a day or so to sort my mind out and try and come to terms with this damn cancer lark. As the days go by I will continue to blog when I feel up for it. I know the way I feel today is only a temporary state of mind. Tomorrow I will be stronger and as the days go by I will be stronger still. Yes, I was doing so well as they say. But you simply can't take anything for granted in life can you? The past is gone and tomorrow is full of the unknown. I can only deal with today.

Bye bye for now people, from the banks of the Silverburn River.

December 19, 2008

I want to begin today by thanking all of you wonderful people around the world that have emailed me and sent text messages. They are a great comfort to me. I started this blog last February, since then over 20,000 people have logged on. Well in theory that could mean one person has logged on 20,000 times, or 20,000 people have logged on once. In that time we have shared the good and the bad times together. You have all been absolutely fantastic. The blog has really served me well through the difficult times early last year. I did say that I would end the blog this February to concentrate on my book. Well in truth I have now almost finished writing the book. I just couldn't wait to start it, and once I got going it wasn't too difficult to blog, write for Manx Tails and write the book at the same time. Assuming I would finish with the blog in February was rather arrogant on my part. I was assuming I would remain cancer free. It just goes to show how important it is to not only deal with the present, but also to make the best of it. Nothing else is certain. Well folks I will call it a day now. I don't want to depress you all, especially at Christmas. I hope you all have a

wonderful Christmas, and I will talk to you again soon.

So, from the banks of the Silverburn River, have a wonderful Christmas. Tom

December 27, 2008

Hello folks, well that's Christmas out of the way for another year. I hope you all had a good one and that by now you have also rewrapped your unwanted Christmas presents to pass on next year. Don't forget to write the name of the person who sent it to you on the box or you may end up returning it to the person who sent it to you in the first place.

I have to say that this Christmas will not exactly go down in my memory book as the greatest ever. I have not coped too well with the news that my cancer has returned. I coped much better last year. I said at the very start of my blogging that I would always be honest with you and try and reflect each day or week as it is. I don't wish to depress any of you so if you want to fast forward the next bit, I suggest that you log out now.

I have been on such a high since the specialist said he didn't want to see me again for 4 months. I knew when I found the lump under my arm that it was cancer starting it's second lap. My days just got worse from then on. I would burst into tears for no real reason and I started at one point to loose my mind as well. One night, well it was 3 a.m.; Barbara woke up to find me sobbing like a baby. When she finally extracted from me what was wrong, I told her I did not want to end my days in hospice all alone. I just can't imagine what put those thoughts in my mind. Sometimes with cancer no matter how loving your family and friends are, you do feel very alone. I am much better now. I don't like the idea of having to wait until January 15th before I can see the consultant again. But that's the way it is. I do feel a lot more positive now though. I am ready to go to war again against the same enemy.

Barbara bought me an Internet radio for Christmas. It is absolutely fantastic! I can now listen to radio Tipp, a station I use to listen to when I was in Tipperary. I have, or at least Barbara has found, two American local radio stations that only play hits from the 50's and 60's, which are also brilliant. When I went through my really low period last week, I even stopped listening to football matches on the radio. I didn't see the point because if it was a cup round, I might not be here for the final and if it was a league match, I may not be around to find out who wins it. All that is behind me now though! I am not exactly the picture of health at present. However, I am in much better shape than I was.

We are having a bit of a gathering tonight which will be great. I want to end by thanking all of you for your many emails and presents. I assure you that none of them have been rewrapped for next year. I know that everyone would wish for a happy new year. It's a bit unrealistic to expect every day next year to be happy so, I shall set a more realistic goal, and wish that you have more good days than bad ones.

December 29, 2008

Good day people. Well firstly I am generally feeling better about life these last couple of days. I am still having problems sleeping, so last night I took 3 of the sleeping pills which is the maximum allowed. They made no damn difference what so ever. I might as well have swallowed a tube of Smarties, so I have chucked the damn things in the bin and tonight I shall return to the brandy bottle.

Blimey, the other day we discovered a copy of my book on sale on Amazon for £35. They must be mad. It's strange how last week I went through a really dark, dark, low period and this week I feel much better, yet nothing has changed. As we both sat up in bed this morning, Barbara touched the lamp I bought her for Christmas. She commented on how lucky she was to have a lamp that only required a touch to turn it on and another touch for it to brighten up. I thought to myself, I wished I could just touch a lamp and my darkness would end. Then it occurred to me that no, I was the lucky one, for I had no need of any artificial light. My lamp burns within me brightly and although it may have dimmed from time to time, it has never gone out.

December 30, 2008

In the convent where I went to school in Liverpool, every Thursday evening we had to go to the school chapel and confess our sins to the priest. Mine would go something like this.

"Bless me Father for I have sinned. It has been one week since my last confession. I have been disobedient and I have been cheeky. Last Sunday I took money out of the collection plate when it went around during mass, instead of putting a penny on it. Please forgive my sins." I would then be sent to the back of the church and told to say 10 decades of the rosary. Had I not admitted to the collection plate business I would have got away with 2 or 3 decades. Trouble was, I knew that the kid who was going round with the collection plate was totally blind like me. The nuns had told us that if we died with sin on our soul we would not be allowed to enter the kingdom of Heaven and would have to spend sometime in purgatory, and at that time I was keen to go on a non stop flight. Later when I had decided the whole damn thing was nothing but a fairy story, I asked myself how can it be considered a punishment to be ordered to spend sometime talking to Jesus and Mary the very people I am suppose to love and who in turn love me. It seemed very weird. When I put this question to the nuns, I was told not to be so smart. So, these unanswered questions remained trundling around in my mind for the rest of my school days. In later years I dismissed the whole of religion as little more than a scourge that has blighted the entire world for thousands of years. Not even when I was told last year that I might only have a short time left to live, did I have any notion to turn to religion. People have often said to me that the world is a very unfair place. Why do some folks on the planet starve, whilst others wallow in food? Why do some folks live in poverty, whilst others bask in riches? Why are some the picture of health, whilst others are sick from head to toe? Answer. Well, of course I don't know, but stop and ponder this thought!

I don't have a personal God, but that does not mean that I don't believe in anything. I believe there is a vastly superior power at work, call him/her/it God if you wish. I'm sure they don't mind. But someone created this world, it didn't just happen. Just imagine if they had made it so everyone was equal. We would all be the same size, the same colour, we would all be able to run at the same speed, and we'd all have the same level of intelligence. So there would never have been a Shakespeare, never have been a Churchill, Mahatma Gandhi or President Kennedy. There would be no point in football or any other sports because we would all be at the same level. We would all be healthy so how the heck would we die? What kind of world would that be? One that neither you nor I would want to live in! So, I don't know about a God but I am certain that whomever it was that created our existence knew exactly what they were doing. You will not find

wealth or poverty in a graveyard. There is neither health nor sickness. Everyone is the same. Dead! Would you still swap your unfair world?

January 1, 2009

Anyone who titles their blog by the date each day is hardly going to miss out on New Year's Day.

I imagine that most of you by now will have broken your new year's resolutions. I have still kept mine from a few years ago which was never to make anymore. I find myself beginning 2009 in exactly the same way as I did 2008. That is to take up my sword and engage in battle with cancer once again. This is quite definitely not the way I would have chosen to begin this year or any other year. But then what choices do we really have in life? At present my mother is in hospital and is enjoying it so much, she does not want to come home. I have been to Nobles many times over the last year, and though I have nothing but praise for the staff there I have never enjoyed it so much that I did not want to come home.

Well now time for a little moan. It seems to me that every day of late, our civil service and Government get more stupid. In this week's Examiner the prison is, or appears to be, trying to prevent people from playing with toy planes, this time hiding behind that word 'security'. They have decided that the model plane club should not be allowed to fly their toys near the prison as it poses a security risk. Have you ever heard as much clap trap? If model planes are posing a security threat to the prison, what on earth did they build their new prison on or near an airfield? It's so easy for any Government run establishments to get away what nonsense they want. All they have to do is quote one of three words, security or health and safety.

Well, here is to 2009 folks and I hope you all have a good one. I leave you today with a little tip, which has come my way from our good friend Cheryl, across the Atlantic on the banks of the Columbia River.

The friendship test; "In order to check out who is your best friend, lock your wife/girlfriend and dog in the car for one hour and when you open it up, see who makes the most fuss of you."

Tom Glassey. On the banks of the Silverburn River.

January 5, 2009

I have now tossed the sleeping pills I got from my doctor into the bin. I would rather put up with sleeplessness than have the side affects of those damn pills. The other night I was sitting in our front room being extremely miserable about life in general. I was getting wound up about the long wait before I can see a consultant. I figured my cancer was getting worse and would not improve until treatment started which is still sometime away. Barbara was watching telly next-door and popped in to check if everything was OK. "What's the matter she asked?" I told her my concerns. She tried desperately hard to allay my fears and after 10 minutes of her best efforts, she had one last ditch attempt to revive my wounded spirit by diverting my mind onto something else "Well, never mind" she blurted. "Soon you will have your Flying Scotsman." Of course I didn't have the faintest idea what she was talking about. She quickly realized she had just parted with her little secret. I collect moneyboxes, I know not why, I just do. She had ordered a model of the Flying Scotchman, which is also a moneybox. It hasn't arrived yet. We both laughed later at the idea that the Flying Scotchman was going to bring me out of my misery. It was those damn sleeping pills that were making me depressed. I have been absolutely back to normal again now that I have stopped taking them. I would like to thank all those who voted for me and have made me Manx Forum's Blogger of the Year, or whatever the award is called. Blimey I have reached the age of 55 and never won a single thing in life, so indeed it is a great honour for me to win this award. I did once however win third prize in the sack race at school, but this by far outweighs that.

Talking of awards, I hear that Malew commissioners decided to award the freedom of Ballasalla to the person who had not shown any disrespect towards them over the last year. However they couldn't find anyone so they have decided to award it to the person who has shown them the least disrespect. I would have loved to have won that award but I am told I was not even in the running.

January 13, 2009

Good morning people. Well I have not blogged for 8 days now. Last week was not my best week ever. I will simply be glad now to begin treatment again next week. I have decided that now though is the right time to bring the blog to an end for the time being. I will of course be back again but I don't know when. It might be in a few months and it might be 12 months. Shortly I will hand over the wheel to Barbara. I shall then fly home to the land I left 12 months ago. It has been one hell of a voyage. I have put our ship on the rocks twice. I am of course hopeful that the ocean tug SS Chemotherapy will pull the ship clear again next week. Whilst I have been writing this blog I have made new friends from every corner of the globe. Every one of you has been absolutely fantastic in coming with me every step of the way. I will of course continue to write for Manx Tails. However, I really need the time to concentrate on my second book, "On the Rocks." One of my problems is that I get an ache just behind my right shoulder, which kicks in after I have written a few lines. I don't know what the cause is, and it will have to wait now until this chemo session is over before I can deal with it. Of course all of you that have been emailing me can continue still to do so.

Well my watch is now at an end. 8 bells have just sounded and it is now time to handover the wheel to a fresh pair of hands. So good people this is Captain Tom Glassey saying thank you and over and out from the SS Silverburn.

January 15, 2009

Frustration

Well, this is my 1st blog and unfortunately it isn't that upbeat. Tom has told me to leave it for now in case I show my anxiety and frustration too much, but I'm sure there are a few people waiting to know how we got on with the oncologist this morning.

We set off for Douglas and got as far as Ballasalla when Tom received a phone call telling him his appointment was cancelled. The Flybe plane that brings in the oncologist once a week was cancelled and so was Tom's appointment. We turned the car round with that sinking feeling in the pit of our stomachs. This was Tom's worry since we had been given this appointment before Christmas. All week I had watched the forecast and was confident that nothing could go wrong to stop the plane!

Once we arrived home in silence, I couldn't just sit and wait. It isn't my nature and I felt I had to give Tom some hope and try and lift his spirits. I checked the airport site to see what planes where going out today and found the next one to Liverpool was this evening. Then I saw one to Chester at 10.30. I felt I had time to try and swing it so Tom could go across at our own expense and see the oncologist over there. I phoned the oncologists secretary and she informed me that he was coming over on the 12.20 flight but would be so behind, he would only be able to see a few people. I explained how desperate we were and I told her we didn't live far from the airport and the oncologist was only wanting to talk to Tom and see if he was fit enough for more chemo. I said we could even meet him at the airport and buy him a cup of tea whilst he chatted for a few minutes with Tom. She said "Awwhhh!" in a 'aren't you cute' way. I told her that's how desperate we are. She said she would get his file out and see what she could do.

We are now playing a very nervous waiting game to see if we can be seen so that Tom can start chemotherapy as soon as possible. It is so difficult to know what to do.

Since I started this blog, Toms friend has phoned the oncologists secretary and she has just phoned Tom. This is the latest in the flight saga.

The oncologist went to Manchester to catch a flight to the Isle of Man, but that has also been cancelled by Flybe! IF and that appears to be a big IF, the next flight takes off from Manchester, the oncologist will try and fit Tom in at 4.20 p.m. with no promises, otherwise he will have to wait for another week. All flights from Liverpool have apparently been cancelled for the day.

Anyway, that's the score at the moment. I will keep you informed of developments. I now have to watch the arrivals from Manchester to see if we have a chance, but I shall go and make us both a cuppa and try to reduce my stress levels.

11 a.m. Update

I checked the departures on the airport site and saw that all planes were delayed. Tom put the 11 o'clock Manx Radio news on and listened to the headlines of how a plane carrying 20 passengers had gone off the the runway. All the passengers are fine thank goodness and there is now an attempt to move the plane. With this in mind and all the planes backed up waiting to depart, we are reconciled to having to wait another week. Reconciled, but not happy obviously. We just have to pray that next Thursdays flight arrives or there will be a lot of desperate people on the Island, waiting to see a cancer specialist with time ticking away.

14.30 Update

Tom has checked with the hospital to check if the oncologist has arrived. He arrived at Ronaldsway at 13.15 and is at the hospital. We have hope again although slim. We will still go to the hospital in the hope that we can be fitted in at the end. Another update will follow later.

18.30 Update

Well Tom was seen by the oncologist who said he wanted to see us and that's why he asked his secretary to put us at the end. He is also staying the night on the Island which he doesn't normally do as he will miss the plane anyway after writing up notes.

Tom starts chemotherapy again on Wednesday afternoon if all his blood tests come back OK and he doesn't catch a bug in the meantime. He explained that the radiotherapy didn't work, but if he has as good a response to the chemotherapy this time as he did last, we will do well. There will be a CT Scan half way through to see if it is working and then a decision will be made whether to continue.

I have to go and prepare some tea for Tom now, so I will leave it for now. It's been a long day!

Humour Lifts The Moment

January 16, 2009

Well it’s a new day and we're both feeling better than this time yesterday. We had our usual middle of the night cuppa and then I went back to sleep. That is the bit that Tom doesn't manage. He has some discomfort that stops him staying in one position for too long.
Yesterday a little gadget arrived that I ordered for Tom last week. It is the visually impaired version of an ipod I suppose. It plays mp3's, talking books, podcasts, records and can also have an add-on to make labels that can be read out loud by the gadget. It uses Daisy player format for the talking books, which allows books formatted with Daisy to be navigated and bookmarks set etc. He took this with him yesterday to the hospital and listened to the book "Attention All Shipping". It took his mind off the long wait and he was obviously enjoying it judging by the laughter that came from him occasionally. Others waiting just said they wished they could hear what was amusing him.
On our way into the hospital I particularly noticed that Tom seemed to put his right foot down loudly whilst the left foot was soundless. I pondered it for nano seconds and then knowing how he has always had a problem wearing shoes down, I told him I thought perhaps that maybe his right leg was slightly longer than the left. "What makes you think that?" he asked. "Its the loud dragging when that foot goes down. Like it hits the floor harder and that’s all I can think of!"
Tom never answered and I daydreamed my way to Medical Outpatients. We sat for probably 1 1/2 hours waiting for Tom’s turn. Tom listened to his book and I played Bubble Breaker on my pda. Eventually our turn came and we were asked to sit in the cubicle that has an examination bed and 2 chairs facing each other. I directed Tom to one chair and I sat opposite him. The nurse left after telling us the doctor wouldn't be long. That’s when I saw it "Oh no!" I shouted. "What?" said Tom. "You have got 2 odd shoes on, one brown and the other black. Even worse, they're not the same style." We both fell about laughing especially me with my daft 'you've got one leg longer that the other'. The right shoe had a leather bottom and the left was more like rubber. I suggested various things we could do for when the doctor came, all of which Tom dismissed. Anyway, it lightened the moment when the doctor and the nurse did clock the shoes after the difficult results were discussed and the options available. At least Tom was his calm self and not phased in the slightest. I would have been mortified like I was when I went to the doctors with my jumper inside out and another time when I lay on the examination bed in the doctor’s due to a stomach problem and the lady doctor pointed out that I had left the massive stick-on Marksies label on my new casual bottoms which stated £9.99.
Anyway, Tom is resting and looking forward to starting treatment. I won't be blogging as much as Tom but I will keep you informed of his progress, health and whatever else may be of interest.
Below I took a sneaky photo of the said shoes as we waited. I thought you may like to see for yourselves. Tom doesn't mind and has given his kind permission.

Hopefully Very Soon

January 19, 2009

Well we are not long back from the hospital where Tom had to have blood tests to check if he will be OK for chemotherapy on Wednesday. This was one of the few times we could jump the queue as people who are having, or about to have chemotherapy, have to keep away from public places so they are not exposed to any colds or viruses etc. Chemotherapy won't take place if Tom has a temperature or if any of his required blood levels as too low. It's a nervous time for him, which only stops when the nurse who delivers the chemotherapy checks everything and then the drug is

administered. It is all for his own good as to give chemotherapy to a person whose immunity is very low, would be very dangerous for him.
We've had a quiet weekend, which is not unusual. Tom’s appetite is not the best at the moment and as I say, chemotherapy is what he is focusing on. He has listened to all but one of the 5 books I got for him from the RNIB. The one that is left looks to be a very large one, so hopefully it will keep him occupied until I order more from him.
With the weather being not too good this weekend, I have cut down my walks with Skipper and have entertained him another way, which he absolutely loves. Skipper is a rejected sheep dog. He wasn't quite a year old when we got him, but the herding instinct is very much in him. That is why he is such a nightmare to take for a walk. He wants to herd pretty well everything that moves. I decided to play to his strengths at home and see if I could have a happier dog. I have hens in the garden and since the day we got Skipper, he has gazed at them through the partitioned fence. So intent was he on staring at them and trembling with anticipation, that I didn't trust him one iota. Anyway I decided to test him. I let him in with the hens and told him to sit and he was happy just to lie and watch them. He never made an attempt to chase or harass them. That was stunning! So, I decided to let the hens into the part of the garden that they are not allowed and that Skipper normally has too himself. I tried a few commands that I looked up on the Internet on training sheepdogs. Most of them he ignored, but a few he knew and soon he was rounding up the hens ever so gently to bring them back. He won't do it without my commands, but he just loves it. He may have not been very good with sheep, but he's brilliant with the hens and so gentle. The strange thing is how he will lie and let them walk past him and he just ignores them and they are not intimidated by him. Once he is given reign to work, he stares them out something cruel. I thought they wouldn't realize they were being given the 'Move it now' stare as they are hens, but believe me, they know he means business and he gets the respect. Anyway, I hope I haven't bored you all with Skipper the hen dog. Anyway, I have to say that my hen dog may be a gentle soul with the hens, but he's still a right sod when I'm walking him. I have to think of more psychology now to have him gentle on the walks.
My next blog will be a chemo update. Bye for now.

A Mixed Day

January 21, 2009

I'm so sorry I am late with an update, but it’s been a busy day. Tom woke this morning and was singing in bed for the 1st time for months. For those who don't know, Tom is a happy person who loves to sing and because of the news of the cancer returning and his dip in his health, his singing has been sorely missed. I've always loved the way he rides above everything and has a song in his heart. Anyway, it was back today with the realization that he would be taking a step towards stopping the cancer. Unfortunately he had some bad news early this morning. His uncle, Norman Gregson, whom he has written about a few times, died in the night. If he is well enough, Tom will blog tomorrow or soon and write about his uncle.
We went to the hospital for 2 p.m. and chemotherapy did take place. I very rarely have time to shop and took advantage of the time and spent some Christmas vouchers in Marksies. I had just over an hour and made the most of it.
Tom took the chemotherapy well and we got home at around 4.45 p.m. His appetite has been pretty poor of late and I gave him what he wanted for his tea, which was a small salad. He was very tired and went to bed at 6. I'd have to say how pleased I was to hear him shout for a jam sandwich. This may not sound like much, but it’s brilliant when you realize how little he has been eating. It also meant that rather than worrying about him being sick after the chemo, it seems to have stimulated his appetite. When a person has chemo, they are also given anti sickness drugs as well, as this is one of the most common side effects and can be quite debilitating. Tom didn't need them last time, but we had been warned that the good health enjoyed last time is going to be highly unlikely this time. We will see.
Anyway, as I say, you will have the master blogger himself tomorrow with luck.
I have to apologize to all who emailed me today and I tried to be cocky and email you back from my new whizzy iphone. Once I had mastered how to hit the right keys on the extremely sensitive screen keyboard, I messed about with my settings. I marveled at the emails I received along with pictures, but I have still not got my settings right for replying to you all. Everything is sitting there unable to make a connection. When I've stopped playing with all the other clever things on the phone, I'll get round to sorting out the things that still don't work. All I will say is that unless you have oodles of patience, do not buy an iphone. If you have, it’s flippin brilliant. I would have to add that it was a delayed birthday present to me from Tom. We had to wait until Manx Telecom got them in stock. I'm going to carry on playing with it now.
Bye :-

Hello folks. Yes I am back again and so soon! Well no not really, I have come out of retirement to write a very special blog dedicated to a very special person. My Uncle Norman (Gregson) or Normie as he liked to be known, followed all my blogs. He didn't have a computer, but he made sure each week that they were printed off for him by someone in an office. Norman sadly past away on Tuesday morning, he simply never recovered from a so-called 'not to serious' operation. I was extremely close to my Uncle Normie. He was a very special person and I am more than happy to be delivering his Eulogy in the Abbey Church at Ballasalla next week.

By some very strange irony I found myself in the chemo ward at Noble yesterday. I was about to begin chemo again for the second time. Last year I was on this very same ward receiving my chemo and just across the passageway lay my Dad. He had died that morning. Yesterday Normie lay just across the passageway having died the day before. Now let me try and give you a brief insight in to Normie's life. He was a wonderful friend; never let you down and was always there for you. I recall a time back in the early 80's when I had relocated to North Wales. I had gone there to learn a bit about restoring antique furniture. I had taken up residence in a flat, which was on the top floor of an old folk's home. Hardly ideal, but with very little money I could not afford to be fussy. I had only been there a few days and was still feeling my way round. I had taken to nipping over the road to a little pub called the Castle. This was in the town of Abergele. I knew absolutely nobody; neither did I know my way around. I didn't know the names of any streets or how to get to the nearest shop even. I remember sitting in the Castle Pub this night having ordered a pint and trying to make it last because I only had about a quid left. There was no one I could turn to for help, as I did not know anyone. I sat there almost crying in to my beer, when all of a sudden the door of the pub burst open and a voice I knew only to well roared across the bar. "Never fear Toma, Normie's here" Norm had been visiting his sick Mother in a hospital in Wales somewhere and tracked me down. Within seconds he had pulled up a barstool ordered his Bacardi, a pint for me and drinks for the landlord and anyone else that was within arms reach at the bar. He even managed to talk the landlord in to giving him a lift to Liverpool the next morning in order to catch the boat, and I enjoyed my first lock-in in Abergele since my arrival. We staggered home at some ungodly hour and turned in for the rest of the night. The following morning Normie had woken on time, dressed, made tea and on leaving, he tossed a handful of fivers onto my bed. In a flash he was gone almost as quickly as he had arrived. That was Normie. Whenever I was heading for trouble, Normie just seemed to appear out of nowhere. Back in about 1970, Normie had not been over here very long. He had relocated back to the Island from Coventry and gone into business with my Dad, landscape gardening. The bowling green in Port Erin is a monument to his work. Anyway I was returning to college in Birmingham where I was hoping to become an engineer. Normie was at the same time traveling back to Coventry to collect his daughter Mandy. She had been staying with her Gran, the fantastic Dolly, a living font of human kindness. Well Normie and I boarded the Manx Maid and set sail for Liverpool on what turned out to be the roughest crossing for 4 years. We both sat in the passenger lounge, and as the ship sailed out of Douglas and got further and further out to sea, so she became a tossing pancake. Every time she took a roll to starboard, every dish and table crashed down the length of the deck, and then all came back on the return roll. An old man spotting his opportunity positioned himself across the open door to the deck and began catching all the passengers as they were hurled from one side of the lounge to the other. Normie decided to set himself up as the official commentator of this malarkey. He described how the old man was hanging on to the lady passengers much longer than he was the men. Normie thought it was great crack. Soon we were hit by a huge sea, which dislodged us out of our seats and sent me and Normie crashing to the floor. I landed on top of Norman and he couldn't do anything because of the fit of laughter he had gone into. Eventually he pulled himself together and we managed to get the seat firmly back in position. Every passenger was throwing up and we were the only two who were wrapped in delirious laughter, lying spread out in the middle of the lounge floor. We eventually we got into Liverpool and boarded a train to Birmingham where Normie regaled the passengers in the carriage with the story of our epic sea voyage. I was starting to think we had just crossed the Atlantic. Eventually someone sniggered "Where have you sailed from?" There was much laughter when we replied "The Isle of Man." In Birmingham Normie got off the train and came with me to the college before continuing his passage to Coventry. I had a small homesick tear in my eye as I climbed the college steps. I didn't turn around but I know Normie was weeping too as he trudged his way back down the college driveway. God bless my Uncle Normie, I shall miss him terribly. He has not gone forever though. I will join him again at some point in the future. Until then, "*Goodbye my very special friend. We part yet again with tears in our eyes, but this parting is not forever. Only a tiny part of you has died. Our love and friendship is still here and will never ever die."*

Now I know you are all enjoying Barbara's blogs. I have not returned to take over again this has been a special blog for a very special person. For the record though, I am now back on chemo and already feeling much better. You are still of course more than welcome to email me.

For the time being though, good bye people and farewell from Tom on the banks of the Silverburn River.

January 25, 2009
Barbara's Blog

I used to think that Tom should think up different titles for his blogs instead of the date, but after sitting here staring out of the window as I try to dream up a title, I'm afraid I'm going to do the same. Well, Tom is doing OK after the chemotherapy. Obviously he is not as bouncy as he was the 1st time he had chemo, as his body has had quite a battering with the previous chemotherapy and especially the radiotherapy. He is eating better, but is tired and a little breathless. Apart from that, none of the other nasty side effects have affected him to date. He was very tired yesterday and had a sleep whilst I went about my daily routine and then I took Skipper to Langness. It was quite a nice day, but very nippy. Walking along the Douglas side, there wasn't much in the way of bird life. I think they were all sheltering lower down in the wetland area. There was the occasional cormorant flying along the coast or sitting on rocks drying their wings. Looking back inland, Snaefell stood out with a shaking of snow on her peak. It was a very clear day, the sun was very bright, and the grass blowing in the breeze also shone with the bright sun on it. I walked across to the Castletown side when I reached Jeremy Clarkson's fence. I don't think I've every seen the path on west side of Langness so muddy. I decided I probably wouldn't use that path again until things dried out a bit.
Today Tom decided he would come for a ride in the camper when I took Skipper out, so that he was getting out of the house, even if he wasn't walking further than the camper. It was much windier today and I decided maybe I'd just go to Fort Island. Tom doubted we'd get over the causeway as the sea was quite wild. I decided that we'd go to Langness instead. I try to walk Skipper away from people and their dogs as I just never know how he is going to react. Its just easier that way and I don't get stressed. I decided the easiest way to go when we arrived at Langness, was the west side path as there was no-one in sight on that side. What a short memory I have! I negotiated the mud and water up to the fence. Apart from the difficult walking conditions, the view was something else. The sea was wild and blue, with wave after wave coming in. I wished I had my camera so I could take a picture to put on the blog. Anyway, Skipper and I walked the road way back and we almost got all the way back to the camper and Tom without meeting anyone, when just at the beginning of the road, a couple stood waiting for their King Charles spaniel. I decided to walk across to the

muddy path with Skipper on the lead so as to avoid a confrontation. It almost worked except the spaniel decided it wasn't going to move, so I attempted to walk past whilst telling Skipper, "No" as he eyed the little dog. Then he started barking. "Sit Skipper" I commanded trying to get some control. He sat, but looked at the spaniel like he does the hens when he seems to be waiting for the next command. I decided to walk on as we where almost at the carpark. The little dog also decided it was a good time to catch his owners up. Skipper pulled as he barked and I held on and shouted "no". In an instant I found myself looking at the sky, still hanging onto Skipper, but oh, I was covered in mud and so embarrassed at finding myself in a prone position in front of the couple. It required a complete change of clothes when I returned home and luckily having a camper meant that I had covers to save the seat. I definitely won't be forgetting the mud at Langness for a while and will make do with the park for this evenings walk. It was nice to return home from the walk and find Toms mum and brother waiting for us. She had baked us a bonnag and an apple sponge. She is 81 and still bakes lovely cakes and scones. Even my mum still talks about the lovely 'melt in the mouth' scones she had from her when she was over visiting last year.
Orry the parrot is barking his head off as I am writing this, in between whistling "The Entertainer". Tom is ready for a cuppa, so I'd better go now.

Some Encouragement
January 27, 2009

It’s almost a week since Tom had his chemotherapy and after a dip, today he is starting to feel a little better. The first few days he felt quite well and he gradually got more tired and his chest became more problematic. I think Monday was his worst day and he is now improving. He was singing again this morning which I've said before, is my Tom barometer. When he initially went to the doctors in December, it was because he found a lump in his armpit. After a CT scan, it was found that the cancer had returned and it was now much higher in his chest. The lump under his arm was connected and so more chemotherapy was suggested. Well, today he felt the lump that he hadn't checked for a while and found it had reduced by about a third. Previously he has only been able to measure any improvement by his breathing, but today he was physically able to see an improvement, hence the singing. Although he is improved, he decided yesterday that he wouldn't be able to go to Uncle Normans funeral to do the eulogy and so this morning he wrote it and the Vicar is going to read it on his behalf. Although Tom is feeling slightly better today, for the rest of the week he enters a critical period where he is very vulnerable to infections. Chemotherapy doesn't just kill cancer cells; it also kills off the red and white blood cells along with other rapidly reproducing cells of the body. By the time Tom has his next blood test for chemotherapy, everything should be back within the normal range for him to have his next treatment.
My walks with Skipper have been somewhat calmer since my muddy bath on Sunday. Yesterday we went to Fort Island for the first outing whilst Tom was resting. It was a beautiful day with a slight breeze and there was only Skipper and I there for most of the time. I'd have to be honest and say that I was a little tired for walking and so I let Skipper entertain himself for awhile chasing planes. I stood and watched the birds and the clear sea gently lapping on the shingle shore. Skipper disturbed a couple of curlews and they flew off showing their annoyance in their call. Ducks seemed to be making the most of the quiet sea and just floated, letting the sea gently move them. I walked down the old jetty and marveled at how clear the water was and how the seaweed seemed magnified in the sea with the sun bringing out all the different colours. After my reverie and Skipper happy at seeing off the planes, we returned home.
Today I didn't go anyway other than the park. This morning it was very misty, but even so, the planes where still taking off and Skipper was getting a good run in an empty park. I checked the trees today as well. I can hear you wondering what I could possibly be checking the trees for. Well, when the trees were shedding their leaves in October/November, I noticed that they had already started to bud. Today I was checking how the budding was doing and it really hadn't changed. It will be a few months before the buds have a surge and we feel the thrill of spring. Tonight when I went to the park, I left it until it was nearly dark. It’s good if it can be planned for the busiest taking off or landing of the planes. It doesn't half exercise Skipper for me. I stood a while with the light of the railway station illuminating part of the park. A little wren was shouting and alarm and as I got closer, it went into a bush and went very quiet. A blackbird was across the park singing probably his last song of the day and a couple of herons clack, clack, clacked in an evergreen tree where they appear to be nesting. Skipper and I made our way home when I was sure there was a lull at the airport. On the river the ducks, swans and geese were having their last meal of the night. All was well.

January 30, 2009

Okay folks, I’m back for at least once a week. Barbara has been giving me a severe ear bashing all morning regarding the blog. I have had to agree to write a blog once a week and it will probably be on Fridays. Yes I really do enjoy writing the blog and I have really missed it. But I really did need to get on with other things that I have neglected. The book is now taking shape and hopefully will be out later this year. I have also had to agree to certain changes to my Manx Tails articles. Their material now will not appear on any blogs as it was starting to cause major confusion.

Now then, can I thank all of you that have emailed believing that I am very sick and the odd one or two that seem to think I’m dead! Yes people, I did get very ill this time round with my chemo, then all of a sudden about three days ago, I started to make a recovery. On Monday I could not walk up the stairs without stopping. I can now run up the stairs. Yes, things are looking a lot brighter lately.

It was my poor Uncle Norman’s funeral yesterday. I wrote his Eulogy of course but was too ill to read it myself so I handed it over to Vicar Roberts at the Abbey Church to read on my behalf. There are so many wonderful things I could say about my Uncle Normie, however, I shall leave it to the March edition of Manx Tails.

Well we are now deep into January and February will be with us in a few days. Just a few more gales and maybe the odd storm to get through and it will be spring once again. This has been a very long and difficult winter for me. There have been lots of tears and disappointments. I really do believe now that I have got the fight back in my belly. I just about gave up on everything. I now have the thirst back and I am ready for the battle all over again. I am off now to make a cup of tea and I hope you will all do the same. I will blog again next Friday, which is the day after I see the oncologist who will check my progress before chemotherapy the following week.

Until then people I say farewell. This is Tom Glassey blogging once more on the banks of the Silverburn River with a happy wife.

February 3, 2009
Barbara’s Blog

I have been getting emails from people wanting an update, so I have put my mind to doing it. Well things have been a bit hectic the past few days and the weather hasn't helped. For people off the Island, the snow hasn't been a problem for us over here. Some places have had snow settling on the ground, but in Castletown we have had the benefit of seeing

the lovely white flakes floating through the air and melting on impact. The real bug bear has been the keen North Easterly which is absolutely biting and awful for asthmatics like myself and people with chest complaints.
Anyway, I've found it hard to write over the weekend as nothing much happened and Tom was stable after his Blog on Friday. I was bragging to my sister-in-law Rosie on Sunday how Tom was hardly coughing and only using the nebulizer twice a day. If I was a superstitious person I suppose I would have touched wood, however I'm not and things did go downhill quite rapidly on Sunday evening. Tom's breathing and cough got worse and we were up in the middle of the night again with the nebulizer. Monday continued in the same vein with the cough getting worse. Tom had a very bad night last night with pleurisy returning with the harsh cough and the pain being almost unbearable. I got in touch with the Hospice nurse who calls each week and explained everything that was happening. She is great for getting things done and we had a district nurse out this morning taking blood to check Tom isn't too anaemic and the doctor called this afternoon. The doctor and nurses visit wasn't because Tom was too ill to go to the surgery, though it may have been a problem the first half of the day until we got the pain under control. It is because now he is on chemo, he isn't allowed to go to the doctor's surgery as his immune system is very low. Anyway, the doctor came and examined Tom this afternoon by which time Tom had improved quite a bit. The doctor decided that it was probably the chemo inflaming his lungs etc and I think he has probably peaked now. He should now gradually regain his strength just in time for the next chemo session on the 11th. Tom sees the specialist on Thursday morning. Next Tuesday he has the blood tests, which will determine if he is fit for chemo the next day. It is always a nervous time in case the blood levels are not back within the limits. All is not lost as the chemotherapy drug will have already been dispensed and it would be expensive to lose, so blood tests are done a couple of days later and if ok, chemo will happen then. The drug has a very short shelf life of around 7 days. Anyway, that's where we are at and as I write this, Tom is much more comfortable. The lump under Tom's arm is very reduced and if that is any reflection on the rest of the cancer, there is a good response.
My hens are laying and if nothing else, we're certainly getting fresh eggs. Skipper is still loving hen rounding up and is becoming very good at it. My aviary birds are feeling spring in the air, even if it is so cold. The male canaries are feeding the females; the male cockatiels are singing and strutting about the females. I don't encourage them to breed as they are prolific and I don't like parting with them, so I don't put nest boxes in the aviary. That doesn't stop them finding little corners and I spend the warmer days playing hunt the eggs with the determined cockatiels. Orry is now in the process of learning "When Irish Eyes are Smiling" for the hospice nurse when she calls. She is totally bowled over with an African Grey landing on her shoulder and wanting to kiss her and has set him the task for her next visit. So far he's more interested in his own extensive repertoire, but we'll get there.
As for describing any walks I have done, they have happened with layers of apparel, hat, gloves and head down into the wind, brass-monkey weather to be precise. I will hopefully improve on that as the weather improves. Today I was just so grateful for Miriam calling for Skipper and taking him to Ballasalla and back along the river.
I'll do a little update when we have the latest blood results. Bye for now.

Help Required

Ok, the blood tests are back and Tom's hemoglobin is very low. That explains why he has been very breathless and not getting enough air in his lungs, very tired and today faint. This morning he woke up feeling well as he slept, apart from our 4 a.m cuppa. He was raring to go but then got faint just after getting dressed. He recovered and has spent his morning writing his next Manx Tails entry.
Anyway, I now need your help if possible to give me some suggestions on how I can get his blood levels up for next Tuesday, hemoglobin especially. To make the task more difficult, green vegetables are out, Guinness at a push and he does suffer with a sore throat. Preferably natural food rather than vitamins which can interfere with the chemo and perhaps some recipes with which to tempt a husband who says he isn't fussy, but will reduce the list of food acceptable drastically. I have to take Skipper out now. It's a beautiful day and the cruel wind has dropped. I have no asthma problems today and so I will enjoy the walk.
Don't forget the suggestions please.

The walk

I took skipper into the park today and what a difference to yesterday. Although there was a slight breeze, it was gorgeous. The rooks followed me as far as the children's playground and I threw bits of bread to them. They can't come beyond there in the park as that is crow territory. There are around 3 families of crows and they have the park divided up from the rookery inwards. The 1st family go almost to the middle gate, the second family stop short of the bullring and the 3rd has the rest of the park. The territory stretches across the park as well almost like a line has been drawn and no crow encroaches without a good thumping. Skipper and I were the only people in the park which was great. I sat on Norman Sloan's bench and just watched and listened to all around me. A military helicopter came over and that exercised Skipper for me as he chased it out of the park. As I had made my way through the park I had made sure each family of birds had been fed. It is easy to see the large birds calling and following me around, but often the smaller birds are also having a meal but are not so obvious. Over time I have become aware of the robins, blackbirds, thrushes and chaffinches etc that wait for me in the bushes. They are more trusting now and they make sure I don't miss them.
Looking across the fields, the sun was shining on the hills and there was snow on the tops. It wasn't thick, just enough to give a patchwork quilt effect with white, purple and greens. The river gently made its way to the harbour beyond the park boundary and the moorhens gave away their positions with their cries. After sunning myself for a while and trying to persuade a robin to land on me, I decided I'd better entertain Skipper a bit better and so I walked on whilst calling him right and left etc making him run after nothing. I walked through the bullring, which is a skate park. A few wood pigeons were startled and flew off when they heard me. The trees are large fir trees and I didn't see the pigeons until they freaked out. I know one of the trees is being investigated by the herons for nesting. It is the tallest tree in the park. They

will probably change their minds and nest further up the river like they did last year. It was a shame to see broken glass in the skate park. Older children tend to use the back of the equipment as drinking dens at night and get some sort of pleasure at smashing the glass everywhere afterwards.

Skipper and I made our way towards home where he met another dog with a similar nature to himself and they got on fine as long as they weren't on leads. Once on a lead, Skipper barks at everything that moves. I believe that is nervous aggression. Anyway, as I sit updating this blog in our bedroom, the sun is going down and shining on Golden Meadow mill, the river and trees in beautiful reds and gold.

Tomorrow Tom sees the specialist and so we may have something to report.

Bye for now

January 6, 2009

Good morning folks. Well this has not been my best week. I have been so damn tired that I have hardly been able to do anything. Anyway today I am having a good day and soon I will be leaving for Port Erin. It is very cold today and at present the sun is shining however, it is also snowing, which proves our weather is very much like our government and tries to be all things to everyone but really hasn't a flaming clue what to do next. With Christmas now well and truly astern of us, Easter is lying dead ahead. When I was at school at the convent in Liverpool I used to wonder how Jesus Christ could have possibly died and risen on a different date each year. I didn't know then and of course the nuns never explained to us that Good Friday was originally a pagan feast day and was always acknowledged on the Friday at the end of the month that was nearest to the next full moon. They kept it to themselves that the Christian church had swiped the pagan feasts of Christmas and Easter because they couldn't accurately date the birth and death of Christ themselves. Anyway I guess I am already in hot water so we shall steer away from that subject now.

Well old Jeremy Clarkson has been at it once again, and if Clarkson can get away with calling Gordon Brown a one eyed Scottish idiot on the BBC, then I can certainly get away with calling him a brainless English crack pot on my blog. Carol Thatcher gets sacked from her show because off air she said a black tennis player looked like a golliwog. Jonathan Ross and his mate get suspended for insulting someone, yet Clarkson can say whatever he likes and get away with it. I guess it goes to show the BBC doesn't really have any ethics. It's all about how much money you are worth to them. If only having one eye makes you an idiot, then Clarkson's got two, which must make him a double idiot. As for me with no eyes at all, well I guess I must be in a league of my own.

Well my friends, that is just about it for this week.

So until we meet again. This is Tom Glassey on the banks of the Silverburn River.

February 9, 2009
Barbara's Blog

I was wondering whether to write today or wait for a bit, but there are quite a few people wanting to know how we are fairing. Well we haven't had the best of weekends as Tom has been quite under the weather. We had to call the Emergency Doctor late on Saturday for advice of how to handle the breathlessness that Tom was experiencing. He is pretty well managing at the moment and we've had the hospice nurse visiting us today. She is going to organize to physiotherapy & guidance on breathing to help Tom's symptoms. Tom's appetite is also not very good but I have stopped stressing now and Tom is drinking the prescribed drinks with all the vitamins and protein that he needs. He also manages some homemade broth. Chemo makes the throat and mouth sore amongst other things and one of the tips we received was pineapple. It acts as a natural antiseptic and soother for sore mouths.
On the positive side, today was the best day weather wise that we have had for ages, which enabled Tom to have a short walk. The weather has been too cold for him to do much or the wind too strong. Today we went for a walk in the park with Skipper. It was only a short walk, but it was good for him.
This Wednesday the next chemotherapy is due. Tom will have the blood tests again tomorrow to check if his blood is ok for it to go ahead. He is a lot better now than he was last week when the blood tests were done and his colour was pale. I am expecting that the hemoglobin will have recovered a bit from the results last week.
Yesterday I walked though the fields with Skipper as I looked for any chickweed and dandelions for my aviary and rabbit. I didn't succeed in finding chickweed, but I did find some dandelions and some nice fresh grass. It was lovely to see the snowdrops growing along the river bank reminding me that it won't be long now before the bank is covered with bluebells and wild garlic. It was a promise that spring is just around the corner whilst Skipper and I were getting a right drubbing in the rain. For all the forecasts of snow, at sea level we have only had rain and the odd hail shower.
Anyway, I will do another update after chemo on Wednesday.
Bye for now

February 12, 2009
Barbara's Blog

I'm having trouble sleeping and thought now would be a good time to update you all on Tom's progress. At present Tom is in Ward 6 at Nobles. We will find out today if he has to fly over to Clatterbridge for emergency radiotherapy for an obstruction.
Yesterday Tom had chemotherapy as planned, but whilst I was there I spoke to the nurse and told her of the troubles we have had over the past week. She questioned me further and decided that a doctor may need to check him out. When chemo had completed a doctor came to examine Tom and then he sent for another doctor for a 2nd opinion. They both agreed that Tom would have to have a CT Scan and ECG to rule out their suspicions and Tom was admitted to Ward 6 in order to have them done in an emergency. By 4:15 they were done and we had to wait for the results which came at around 5.45 p.m. We got the news that the tumour is pressing on his throat etc. and causing difficulty in swallowing, speaking etc. etc. The oncologist is over here today and so we will know what the next step is going to be. It was a long day and to make matters worse we had Skipper in the camper van. Luckily we have a combination vehicle that acts as both a car and camper and so it wasn't too bad for him. I was able to give him fresh water and we had more than one walk in the Millennium Park (I know I have the name wrong but I can't think straight). At 6 o'clock, after much resistance, Tom persuaded me to go home and sort some things out for him as we were told he would be staying the night. I didn't want to leave him and yet I had to think of Skipper and get Tom the things he needed. Our friends Ray and Pauline

Cregeen came to the house to let Orry out for a while and Ray took Skipper for a walk whilst I gathered Tom's things and Pauline made a cuppa. They basically took control of things whilst I gathered this, that, and the other in somewhat of a daze. Anyway, I returned and stayed with Tom until around 8:30 when he was feeling very tired. That is where we are at. Today things may move very fast or they may drag on. I will update this blog as I find out what is happening.
I have to apologize to everyone who emails me and never receives a reply and explain that I'm finding it very difficult to put my mind to emailing people. So Dorothy, I have heard the birdsong radio channel on the Internet radio whilst looking for stations for Tom. My "Oh look, a bird song radio channel", brought no response from Tom and I moved on. Elizabeth and Wendy, I do read and enjoy your emails but I leave it to Tom to write to you both. Janine, Tom will probably text you when I take the correct phone charger into the hospital. I took 2 chargers to the hospital yesterday for his phone and radio and I got both wrong. I'm grateful to all my friends who email me and know that they're not going to get a reply, but continue to write to me. It sounds selfish doesn't it, but I will get round to phoning you all at some point.
I'll go and make a cuppa now and I will keep you all informed throughout the day.
I've just received a text off Tom "I am awake. I had a good night sleep. Feeling really good." I'm happy now I've heard and he's feeling well. I'll talk later.

11 a.m.
The oncologist has been to see Tom and because he had chemo yesterday, radiotherapy would be much too soon. He is being given steroids and along with the chemo, they are hoping it will reduce the pressure etc. He is being kept in hospital for a few days to monitor him and he is in good spirits at the moment. His brother Lenny went into the hospital at 10 this morning and delivered the correct chargers so he will be able to use his phone again. I will be going in to see him this afternoon and will let you know if there is anything to report.
For now, I have been going to see to me aviary birds and hens for the last hour, but I seem to be taking treble the time to do anything. Orry is having some 'out time' and grooming both me and himself as I type. Our friend Miriam from across the road has taken Skipper for a good walk for me, so all I have to do now is get my act together.

February 14, 2009

Tom came home yesterday afternoon and was going to write a blog today, but he's a little tired now. I know that people will be wondering what is happening and so after a hectic day so far, I will update you before I read the paper.
Tom isn't too bad although the obstruction remains but is being controlled by steroids and chemotherapy which he had on Wednesday. His voice starts off well in the morning and deteriorates as the day goes on. The district nurse came today and again tomorrow to give him anticoagulant injections as he has a bit of clotting. He is in good spirits and full of tales from his short stay in hospital. You will be able to gauge his mood yourselves when he does do his blog.
I'm just going to relax now with a cuppa and leave the rest to Tom probably tomorrow.
Bye for now

February 15, 2009

Well yesterday was Valentine's Day. Barbara and I have never gone in for these so-called special days. It seems to me that just about every day in the calendar is dedicated to someone, something or some event. They are nothing more than moneymaking rackets though, as far as I am concerned. Barbara and I buy presents and pull surprises whenever we feel so inclined. These days, every day I wake is a joy and usually full of surprises. Mind you, I did once have a rather special Valentine's Day back in 1968 in Liverpool when I was at school which I will tell you about later.

Now then, I went to the hospital last Wednesday for my usual chemo treatment. I might not have done so if I had known what lay ahead of me. The chemo treatment went as normal. After chemo I was looking forward to going home when the nurse decided she needed a doctor to look me over. This was arranged and the doctor came and decided after consulting with another doctor that I didn't look too clever and needed a scan in order to confirm what he thought was wrong with me. I was informed that if the scan confirmed it, I would become an emergency patient and flown out to Liverpool onboard the air ambulance that day. This came as a great shock to me as I felt fine. Anyway, I did become an emergency patient and I was carted off to a ward and told to wait for the arrangements to be made. An hour later I was downgraded to just an urgent case and would fly out on the patient transfer flight the next day. Very good I thought, treatment has not even begun yet and I must be getting better. I asked the doctor what exactly they intended doing with me. He said "Radiation at Clatterbridge." I explained that that was impossible as I had had radiation treatment last July and they would never agree to radiation again so soon in the same place. No one was listening to me though and bless my soul within an hour I was upgraded to a full emergency air ambulance patient again. Not to worry, it didn't last long as within another hour or so I was not going anywhere. The doctor came in and informed me that he had spoken to Clatterbridge and they would inform the specialist who was due over to the Island the next day and he would decide the treatment. I was then left for the night in peace not knowing really what was to become of me. I still did not know whether I was to be sent to Clatterbridge the following day or not. I lay in bed worrying about Barbara. What on earth would she do? How could she come to England on a minutes notice? What would happen to Skipper and Orry our parrot, not to mention all the other birds? About 11 p.m. I drifted off to sleep only to be woken at 11:30 to be given a sleeping pill! The following morning I woke, dressed and lay on my bed still wondering what was to become of me. The doctor turned up mid morning and informed me that I was going nowhere. Clatterbridge was not an option because of my earlier radiation treatment and the fact that I had only just had a chemotherapy cycle. If only he had listened to me yesterday. The Specialist had arrived on the Island to see other cancer patients and after looking at my scan he decided that he could get to the bottom of my problems over here. My brother arrived mid morning and together we observed the general goings on the ward until lunchtime. At one point, an unattended bed came crashing threw the ward doors and crashed in to one of the nurse's cabinets at the far end of the ward. The porters followed close behind but didn't seem too put out by the affair. I will tell you more about my stay in Nobles Hospital at a later date.

Well to finish off for today we go back to that Valentines Day. I was telling you about at the beginning I was at school in Liverpool and took myself off with a mate one Saturday afternoon to watch Prescott town play a football match. Prescott won the match 5-1 as I recall. The Prescott striker was named Eddie Valentine and he scored three goals and we all went home delighted.

Until next week then people, I am still soldiering on the banks of the Silverburn River.

February 18, 2009
Barbara's Blog

Things are ticking over quite well for Tom and I at the moment. Today we go to the blood clinic at Nobles to have Toms blood clotting checked. We went on Monday and Tom still required daily injections by the district nurse as well as Warfarin. Tom is still doing well despite his set back and is eating better and is full of humour.
We had a new shower bath fitted last Friday and a vanity unit yesterday. Our bathroom is small and about 9 years ago we decided to get rid of the bath and have just a shower. It was fine for quite a while, but we have both been missing having a good relaxing soak. Anyway that is now resolved and it's great.
Whilst we are waiting for the blood results today, I'm eventually going to call in Manx Telecom to sort out the emailing on my I-phone. I'm still trying to get to grips with the touch screen keyboard. It was fine when I had my PDA and used a stylus, but I don't half get frustrated typing in the I-phone using fingertips. I've ended up making more phone calls as I just find I haven't the patience sometimes and go for the easy option. It's probably cheaper at the end of the day.
Our friend Miraim has been brilliant taking Skipper out whilst we are back and forth to the hospital. I also found it hard to leave Tom for very long when he came home from the hospital and Miriam has taken the pressure off me a lot by making sure Skipper has had a good Collie workout.
The weather has improved of late and is warmer and sunnier. Hopefully we will start to get some benefit from the motor-home part of our vehicle and I'll be able to exercise Skipper and then make a cuppa and sit by the sea with Tom in the comfort of the camper.
I'll have to make a move now to get everything done before we head off.
Again thanks to everyone who has emailed me. We are doing fine and now entering the dip after chemo, but so far nothing to report.
Bye for now.

February 20, 2009

Everything is going OK for us this week. Tom has been feeling much better despite being in the low period of his chemo. He is on large doses of steroids, which is causing him to be so well. Also after weeks of eating very little, he has managed fish, chips and mushy peas twice this week.
We were at the hospital again this morning for the anticoagulant checks. He's still not quite there yet with the levels, but hopeful when we have the test done again on Monday, there will be a difference. He's even been sussing out whether he can have an alcoholic drink as well, which he hasn't had since around Christmas. He can have a small amount, which is what he was down to anyway, so if he does feel like one, he can have one.
Tom is very busy with his book and this is keeping him occupied in between hospital visits etc.
I haven't had the time to spend with my aviary birds this week apart from the routine feeding etc. Orry is cuckooing as I write this and I've been trying to teach him to cuckoo and then whistle the cuckoo waltz in between. Now he's barking and next he'll be calling me in Tom's voice or Skipper in mine. Skipper has been taking his hen rounding up a little bit too seriously. Yesterday 4 hens were sunning themselves in a corner of the garden and 2 others were pecking down the other end of the garden. He wasn't happy until he'd got them all in the sun corner and then decided he'd move them all into an old greenhouse which they use in the winter for sunning themselves. The ducks and geese on the river have reduced their food intake, which generally means they are feeling the spring as well. Most of the wild birds are now busying themselves making nests and declaring territory. I love the spring and the young birds, but there is also a lot of sadness as well. Male ducks drown the females and other males. I've seen the geese do it to each other as well. Anyway, it's all part of nature, but it's difficult to watch.
Next Thursday Tom sees the oncologist and is down for chemo the week. Anyway, I'm out of things to say. Tom will write over the weekend, but my little update keeps you informed.

February 21, 2009

Well hi there folks and welcome to a good old beef from me after a weeks silence. Today it's the airport that is doing my head in. Well not just the airport, I guess I could say general security on the Island. Our Government has followed a policy over the last 20 years or so that appears to be based on what everyone from outside the Island appears to know what is best for us. So we have imported boat loads of civil servants from the UK and given them out top jobs so that they can and are free to make the same mess over here as they have done across the water. We used to have a nice quiet quaint little airport until the playboys and girls turned up. Just look at (in my opinion) the outrageous goings on down at Ronaldsway. Firstly we now have to find an extra 2 million quid for an extension to a runway that in my opinion is totally unnecessary, all because Alan Bell used the wrong chequebook when he was paying for the thing. This extension it would appear, is to comply with minimum runway lengths throughout Europe, or is it by the CIA, God knows and He isn't answering me so far and I have asked Him twice. They are getting away with murder on this compliance lark. They are using compliance as an excuse to waste our money and squander our resources. Over half the runways in Europe do not and will not comply with this latest bloody nonsense. The Americans certainly had a security problem in their airports. However, I still believe the aircraft that crashed into the Twin Towers would have done so anyway. To prevent or eliminate it here, we decide to build a runway that is capable of taking the size of aircraft the terrorists prefer to use. Once this monster has been completed they have another little nugget up their sleeve, folks. Yes, they are going to erect the most expensive hi-grade security fence around the entire airfield. This will undoubtedly become the most expensive fence ever built to keep mushroom pickers off the airfield. I think the cost was something like £200,000 the last I heard. Well let's hope Allan gets his right chequebook out this time then. Then you take all the rest of the nonsense that goes on down at the airport, such as taking your shoes off to be checked out. In my case, I am usually handing my shoes over to a neighbour or at least someone that knows me well, in order for them to make sure I am not carrying a couple of bombs in my heels. Well folks I can tell you that I already have enough problems finding my way around our cluttered pavements without the additional hassle of lugging a couple of bombs around in my shoes. Flying is still in my opinion by far and the best way of getting from A to B, and until someone invents a better way we are stuck with it. Anyway no one is going to take a damn bit of notice of me, so I will now shut up on this subject. In fact people I am going to belt up for the day as I can't concentrate very well on writing these days. It's coming back to me, but a few more days are needed under my belt. I will blog again tomorrow as I have probably achieved nothing more than doing your poor heads in this morning.

I am still plodding my way along the Silverburn folks; however, I do get scared every time I see a digger or something arrive at the railway station. A dratted security fence along the banks of the river I think to myself, or could it be that some civil servant has located a document in the Manx Museum telling the story of how a drunken monk from Rushen Abbey fell in the river and drowned back in the 1700's, so now they have to erect a security fence to prevent it happening again today! There are no monks left, so I guess it would just be as always is the case - done in our best interest folks.

February 26, 2009

We have been to the hospital this morning for Tom’s check up before his next chemo cycle. The Oncologist appeared pleased with Tom’s improved health and the chemo will go ahead next Wednesday. Tom doesn't seem to be having many symptoms from the chemotherapy. What previously we thought were side effects were in fact caused by the tumour. Tom totally lost his voice at one point and was communicating by whispering and texting me when I was in another room or even dialing my mobile. This week his voice is getting stronger day by day and it’s obvious that the chemotherapy is actually improving things. The other day when Tom’s voice started to show a significant improvement, he sang a line of a song as I woke. It was great to hear him sing and indicative of how well he was feeling and the overnight improvement. There is a long way to go before his voice will be a baritone again, but at least we are heading in the right direction. He's happy and improving and that is all that matters.
Yesterday Tom came for a walk in the park and sat on a bench whilst I exercised Skipper. It was a beautiful day sheltered from the breeze and sitting with the warming sun on him. It has been a while since he has been well enough to dare walk to far without the car as backup. The park was full of children playing and Tom seemed pretty entertained listening to them, especially one little girl who exclaimed to her friends that she wasn't playing anymore if she couldn't be captain.
I walked Skipper to the waterfall the other day and listened to the noises from the herons nesting in the large fir trees close by. One appeared to be calling their mate, probably to take over the nest. I could also hear the cries of a baby heron. It was obviously quite young, but still quite distinctive with its grating cry. As it gets older and is joined by other siblings, the noise will get louder and sound more like someone hammering and doing running repairs. I will try and get a sound file when it gets to that stage. When I first heard it years ago I wondered what on earth the noise was.
Skipper is presently out for a walk with Miriam and will be pretty tired by the time he comes home. Having said that, I don't think its possible to tire a collie.
Tom will be blogging over the weekend and so I shall go now and make us both a cuppa.

The Last Chapter

Barbara’s Blog March 4, 2009

36 years ago I drove up Onchan Head very early in the morning. It was summer and there was a most fantastic sunrise that caused me to stop my car and take in the breathtaking scene. What made this memory stand out so much after all those years is the fact that I'd spent the whole night ferrying people to Nobles and supporting distraught wives, husbands and parents who where waiting or who had received news of their loved ones missing or injured in the Summerland Disaster. I was a young 21-year-old Salvation Army Officer. I was worn out that morning and traumatized myself by the events that happened and the pain of having to tell a mother she had lost both her husband and son and many more besides. Then there was that beauty that for one instant caused my spirit to lift as I marveled at the view as Summerland smoldered. Today I awoke to an equally awesome sunrise. I couldn't see the sun, but against a dark blue sky, beautiful pink clouds where everywhere in the sky. In the white frosty field across the river, I could see the rabbits running about. The birds flying across the skies with their nest building twigs, shone pink in the reflection of the rising sun. I had spent a good part of the night awake watching Tom and going through the events of the day before which were traumatic for both of us and all those that know and love Tom. Then just for a short time I was able to marvel at that scene. It melted away as the clouds blotted out the sun, but for a short time my spirits lifted.
Now we have to enter the last chapter of our marriage as I nurse Tom through the most traumatic and difficult part of his whole life. Yesterday chemotherapy was withheld as his blood tests showed that the cancer had now gone to Toms liver and was very aggressive. Yes, my heart is heavy and aching and Tom is facing it with the courage and fortitude he has faced every trauma in his life, although this is by far the worst. I now have to put tears aside as there will be time for those later and do the best I can for Tom, along with the nurses that will come and help me. Tom feels it is unlikely he will complete his 2nd book but there is enough material already and with the help of friends, I will finish the book.
I haven't the time, nor the concentration to answer individual emails but I am thinking of all who write and I will keep you updated via this blog.

March 7, 2009

Lots of people are emailing Tom and wondering how he is. I felt it was now time to let you know that he has been saying goodbye to his family and friends individually and letting them know he is leaving us very soon. Tom is at peace with everything and is now focused on leaving this world. He said he wished he could give just 5 minutes of the peace he has to all those who are weeping for him. He said it is indescribable. He is sleeping most of the time and I am trying to keep him as comfortable as possible. As hard as it is for me, I only want that peace for him now with no more struggling and suffering. I will keep you informed.
God Bless
Barbara

Tom Died At Sunday 8th March 12.15 Noon

Traumatic Day

March 8, 2009

It has been a hard day but now I am sitting at my laptop in bed with an empty space beside me, I think it will be cathartic to write a little. I have known since Tom's diagnosis last January that Tom wasn't going to live very long. 6 months to 2 years max was the figure I was given by more than one doctor and in every piece of information I could find on small cell lung cancer. Tom responded to chemo as happens in the majority of cases but it comes back. Tom was so optimistic when his chemo allowed him to walk miles again and I wanted so much to keep that optimism going. I didn't want any medical staff to burst his bubble and I genuinely felt that his optimism could carry him on for longer than expected. I'm sure we had more time together because of it and Tom certainly enjoyed last year. I used to trawl the Internet as he slept looking for anything I could on the disease and cures. Everything pointed to the same dire prognosis. I made myself ill in my frantic effort to find a way of saving my husbands life. Luckily the doctor acted and I was given antidepressants for stress, anxiety and depression. Every time someone remarked on how well I was doing, I felt like a fraud. I didn't even tell Tom for a while, as it would have put out the wrong signals to him when he was in remission. Anyway, it all came out in the end when the cancer did return and even then I managed to keep the optimism going until this week when Tom struggled to get to chemo. He had been unwell for a few days and felt that the chemo would boost him and he would be fine again. Unfortunately the blood tests revealed that Tom's liver was hardly functioning. It was explained that 3 weeks previously when the tests where done, his liver was functioning perfectly and within 3 weeks it had deteriorated dramatically. If it continued with such rapidity... We went home and Tom new he could be helped no longer and he was dying. We didn't realize it would be so quick. Each day from Wednesday has seen a dramatic deterioration and Tom told me yesterday that he was going very soon and much quicker than we both thought. He said goodbye to all friends and family and by the time yesterday evening came Tom was already fading quickly. I held him all night and all this morning until he died. To say I have been distraught would be an understatement, but I didn't want Tom to suffer. He died peacefully in my arms and I am grateful his struggle is over. The cancer was too aggressive to fight.

I'm numb at the moment and have also had little time to myself. i don't think the reality has hit home, This week I have to plan his funeral which will take place on Saturday 14th March at 2 p.m. at Malew Church. I am now going to try to sleep as weeks of nursing Tom through the night has taken its toll. For now I will sleep and face another day tomorrow without my soul mate.

A New Day

March 9, 2009

I hope this doesn't look like overkill from someone that has been blogging to keep you all informed of Tom's progress when he decided to wind down his blog. I'm getting a strange kind of comfort from putting down my thoughts and speaking to his friends. I am receiving so many emails and messages of comfort that I want you all to know that after the funeral I will answer everyone of you individually. I haven't been able to email people previously, as my mind was totally focused on Tom and his needs. I couldn't manage anything else. He was my life and we were and still are soul mates. Now I don't have to look after his physical needs, I'm getting comfort from talking about him, planning for him and I will more than make up for my lack of communication to our joint friends which includes all those who have never met him, but have communicated with him and have still meant as much to Tom and I.

Today I still feel comfort that Tom has left his rather battered body, which I like to think of as a chrysalis. I'm hoping I can maintain that way of thinking when the funeral takes place on Saturday. Tom planned the songs for his coffin going in and going out of the church and wanted traditional hymns. I asked what they were and he said he wanted me to pick those so we had planned the funeral together. That is how we did most things, together. I am going to write the eulogy, which I can only do with love and without the wisdom and wit that Tom would have managed.

At the moment this all appears quite controlled and matter of fact, but I think there is something I should possibly share with you that may help to explain my composure to a degree. Tom has an article going in Manx Tails in April where he writes about a peace that he received when he was in hospital 3 weeks ago. I'm not going to go into that now, but on Wednesday night when he knew the end had arrived, as he was going to sleep he said its the 1st time he was going to

sleep without a goal. I told him his goal was to now find that peace he had received 3 weeks previously. In the course of the days that followed I asked him had he received that peace and he said yes. He said he wished he could share just 5 minutes of it with everyone who was grieving for him as it was indescribable. I'm not going to temper my writing for the atheists and I am going to write this as it happened. I asked had he prayed and he said he had been talking to different people. He didn't recognize their voices but they talked to him. Knowing that I have a deep faith even though I don't go to any place of worship, Tom then said "I never said that God didn't exist you know. I just said that I believe that God is for all people he does not just belong to one particular religion or group of people. He is a God for all." I said that sometimes it sounded like he was anti, but Tom didn't want people trying to 'save him' or talk him into things. He was the most spiritual man I have ever met and even with my faith, he made me feel humble. I feel that I have a little of that peace he wanted to share. Maybe I'm in shock, maybe I will go to pieces at sometime in the future, I don't know. Maybe it's the antidepressants. All I know is that for 18 years I have been married to the most wonderful man imaginable and we have been closer than most by virtue of his blindness. We didn't have children, as we felt complete, married late and just wanted each other. Only a power greater than I, can be giving me comfort now when I was totally distraught when Tom's body died. For now I will enjoy that peace and now continue doing what must be done.
Time for a cuppa I think. Thank you for continuing to read my ramblings. x

A Strange Day

March 10, 2009

I slept a little better last night although still fitfull. I am grateful that so far I have not dreamt that Tom is alive and had to go through the devastating realisation when I wake up. I'm always aware that life has changed and there is an empty space beside me but at the same time he is with me.
Yesterday the phone woke me at 7.50, which was late for me, but I was still too dazed to answer it and I lay there and just listened to the morning song birds and gathered my thoughts. I decided I would have to do something about Tom's Manx Tails article for April. It had already gone in, but I felt maybe I should write something in addition by way of events after the article was completed. I got to work on it when I was half dressed. My sister Janet who has come over to support me was fluttering about trying to get me to drink tea, but I was focussed. Then came a bacon sandwich and another cup of tea as I busied myself with the task in hand. Eventually I had finished and emailed it off along with a little explanation. It was then that I glanced at my watch and saw it was 9.50 a.m. I had to be at the Castletown registry office to have the death certificate filed etc. It only opens between 9 and 10 a.m so I ran down the stairs, threw on my coat, got the car keys and shouted my intentions to my sister as I ran out of the door.
I arrived at the registry office, which is in the Castle and was ushered into a room to wait until another client had finished their business. That is when I had my resolve not to cry, suddenly shattered. As I glanced into the room, I recognised it from some years previously as the room we had sat in when Tom had been best man for his friend David. I couldn't go in and the tears welled up in an instant. I opted to sit on a seat outside the office I would be entering soon to file the certificate. I remenisced about the wedding. There had been some humour when Tom had been asked to sign the register. I had taught Tom to sign his name when he had to sign books and was happy he could do the task at hand. Then the registrar asked Tom to print his name. Panic welled up in me, as I knew Tom didn't know how to print it. I asked could he not sign it and the answer was that it had to be printed. With that I had to go to Tom's side and guide his hand to actually print his nme.It brought me back to the only other time he had to write his name and that was when we got married. He always signed with a cross and I asked him before the wedding could he please write his name otherwise I could be married to anybody. I don't know how he did it on that occassion but he did. All I know is that as he was writing it he said he was panicking as he couldn't remember how a Y went. All the time he slowly printed his name he was trying to recall the 'Y'. He said just as he finished the 'E', there must have been devine intervention as it just came to him. He said the only letters he really new off by heart where LOPVIRE and that was because he had a cup which he drank tea from at his mother's which had the letters on and he would feel them with his fingers whenever he had a drink. It said LIVERPOOL.
I'm digressing and yet again I feel I want to digress for now, as I want to talk about Tom. Tom's school taught him well as everyone will appreciate but he was taught to cumminicate in Braille. In that world he was taught the alphabet initially with some thick manilla paper and a spike, which was used to formulate the Braille equivalent of a letter and it was a combination of 6 dots. Then he was taught on a Braille machine which made it so much easier which again is like a very old typewriter only with 6 keys that where used in different combinations. When the keys were pressed, they all had to have equal pressure or the letter required would turn out entirely different if a dot was too faint to be read. I know you

are all wondering how he managed to write his book, emails and blog etc. I'll save that for tomorrow and just say for now hat he was a truley remarkable man with a determination to that would leave even me open mouthed.
Back to my day sitting outside the registry office in the castle: My turn came and I had pulled myself together after my little weep. The lady registrar was sensative and understanding. Sh asked me the normal fullname, DOB type questions and I watched her write it down with her fountain pen. She got to the point where it asked for relationship to the deceased and as I was reading upside down from my side of the desk, it took a little longer. It didn't look like 'Wife of the deceased'. Then I had my next shock; 'Widow of the deceased.' Until then I was Tom Glassey's wife and now I was a widow, but inside me screamed 'No, I'm Tom Glassey's wife.' When I told her she said everyone got a shock when they saw that. I'm over it now and no matter that I will have to write widow on forms, I'm still Tom Glassey's wife.
I left the registry and realised I should have been in the hairdresser 10 minutes ago as it was now 10.55 a.m. I hadn't been able to leave Tom for quite sometime and now was the time to get my poor old grey roots done to make myself look my best for Tom on Saturday. I dashed to the hairdressers without any money as I had spent what I had in the registry getting copies of the certificate. Denise the hairdresser understood and I was able to sit and ponder for a while as I sat there. There was much more yesterday which doesn't seem so important now. The only embarrassing thing about the registry office and a few hours in the hairdressers was that I had run out the house so quickly, I still had my bed socks on!

Such A Hectic Week March 12, 3009

I have been lying here listening to the birds and trying to relax and enjoy the sounds and also the peace that can be found behind the door of the bedroom. I was so busy the past few weeks caring for Tom and trying so, so hard to keep him with me even though I knew it wasn't going to happen. My mind would flick from desparately trying to get him to eat to acceptance of him leaving me. Tom and I always enjoyed quiet times together. Early morning was one of them and the afternoons were the others. This week I have had no quiet times except for maybe two early mornings, the rest of the time has been preparation for the funeral or lots and lots of visitors. Today is my last day for getting it all right and hoping I have not forgotten anything. The problem is at the moment; I'm not sure what I may have forgotten. I have organized the food, though I think I am confirming numbers today. I have organized the flowers but I have to write my cards and deliver them to the flower shop. I have sorted the music but the song going into the church has still to be completed and some means of playing the songs in the church. I decided against doing the eulogy myself as Tom always added a touch of humour and I am unable to do that. I would be too maudling. I wasn't going to read it, only write it for someone else to read, but I am unable to do even that. I have instead asked Tom's other self, Ian Cottier, to do the Eulogy and he will be coming tonight to see if I am happy with what he has done. I don't need to see it as I trust him implicitly, but he will feel better running it by me. Ian was Tom's other self because he narrated Tom's book "Who's Afraid of the Dark" which was serialised on Manx Radio. The vicar came last night and so we have now agreed the order of service, songs and reading which my sister-in-law Rosie is having printed today.
Tomorrow everyone from away starts to arrive and so the house is going to be quite busy. The funeral will leave from the banks of the Silverburn River at around 1.45 and it will do a small detour over Thirtle Bridge as a last goodbye to Castletown Harbour where Tom spent many happy hours.
I am still hoping to stay focussed but I know now that it is a forlourn hope. I do know that he will be wondering what on earth I am playing at though. I've arranged the funeral unbeknown to me at the time, on the biggest football premiership game of the season, the Liverpool/ManU game. Oh well, I'm sure he'll understand on this occassion.
Bye for now.

The Day Has Come

March 14, 2009

Well yesterday ended up being as frantic as I anticipated with all the jobs that I had to do. There has been a task that I completed which I hadn't mentioned in my blog in case I couldn't complete it. Tom told me the songs he wanted on entering and leaving the church. I could have been really easy on myself and pulled the songs off the Internet, but I decided not too. The first song is an Irish ballad called The Spinning Wheel and the second is Beautiful Isle of Somewhere as that is where he will be. He said that people wouldn't understand why he chose the first song and when I read the words I realised they were meant for me and were symbolic. So I have put myself through it this week and I have been

busy getting together a verion sung by me with the help of Robin Crompton and Dave Stewart. It is completed and although not perfect, I am satisfied with the result. Robin recorded the 2nd song and so now it is all locally done. Robin's wife Geraldine was the little sister of one of Tom's childhood friends, Tony Sloane. Tom often told me how Tony and himself would be clambering over the rocks collecting limpits I think he said whilst Geraldine would be shouting Tom to come back because of the danger and trying to tempt him back with her baked cakes. When I mentioned it to her this week she smiled as she remembered and told me and my sister how she was totally in love with Tom as a child. Being a young boy, it would have been lost on him.
My mother arrives today, along with my other sister and her daughter. I'm worried about my mother-in-law Nel as she has had so much sadness in her life and carried it with such fortitude, but losing Tom has now taken her beyond what she can bear. She lost one son, Kevin, 30 years ago, her husband Dennis last year and now Tom. I wish I could ease her pain but I can't. I just hope she gets through today and from then on we will look after and support each other.
Anyway, its still the middle of the night and I should really try and go back to sleep for a few hours. Today I will need to be rested and ready to meet the day.

March 15, 2009

It Was A Beautiful Day

The house started to fill quite early on Saturday morning with family coming from across. My aunty and cousins arrived first and I found it hard to keep my composure. Tom's brother Lennie and his wife Rosie also arrived to pick my mother, sister and niece up from the airport and also to think and do the last minute things I was incapable of. My sister Janet had been with me all week and she has been a star looking after me and the people wanting to show their support and voice their sorrow. Janet has made sure that if one cup of tea has gone cold without my drinking it, there was another and along with something to eat, she would almost stand over me to make sure I ate it. I was so busy and focussed planning for Tom, without her I would have neglected myself badly. She also made sure I did the things I was supposed to as time became nothing to me and I would have missed every appointment I had made.
Less of me now and back to Tom's 'send off.' When the funeral cars arrived with Tom's beautiful coffin and flowers, I felt strangely detached. I was still trying to focus on my image of the chrysalis as Tom's earthly body and his spirit was free like a beautiful butterfly. Last year at his father's funeral, a butterfly fluttered around the mourners for most of the ceremony and I felt comforted by it. It was beautiful. Anyway, I was so detached. I was able to help direct people to the cars I'd decided they were going in. I sat in the front seat on the car that followed the coffin but by this time I was having to do controlled breathing to calm myself. Nearly every car we met stopped as we left our home by the Silverburn and gently made our way to what will be our last resting place. The church was totally full of people and that included the gallery. The coffin was carried into church to the sound of the Spinning Wheel song, the Irish love song which symbolised Tom waiting for me. Ian Cottier did a beautiful eulogy to Tom and did it by using extracts from Tom's own book along with his own thoughts which made people both laugh and cry. Don Gelling read 'Desiderata' which was the poem that so touched Tom's life, the words of which he tried to live by. The vicar Norma Cole did a very good sermon and along with the 2 songs 'Great is Thy Faithfulness' and 'How Great Thou Art' the service went beautifully. At the commendation the vicar stood by Tom's coffin and sang a small unaccompanied chorus 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace.' It was brave of her and the chorus was so apt of Tom's last days. The coffin was then carried out to the song 'Beautiful Isle of Somewhere', prerecorded by Robin Crompton who has a voice in the style of Jim Reeves. Tom's mum did very well and I was so pleased she was able to cope. The grave is in a very easy to find place and is in a grassy area which in years to come will always look tidy when there is no-one around to tend it. The flowers I ordered which I thought would be an impossibility to do were beautifully done, a Steampacket boat from the 60's.
Refreshments and buffet were laid on at the Sidings and our home. I thought that would please both groups of people. I was amazed at the distance people traveled to attend Tom's funeral. Phil Walker who built Tom's boats and his wife arrived from their new home in the Isle of Skye, Wendy and Sean, whom Tom met through his Blog and Manx Forums came from London. Aunts and uncles arrived from all parts of Ireland and England. It was a truly wonderful send off for an amazing man.
A friend came to me at the house after the funeral and chatted to me for a little while. She was telling me how she enjoyed the service and offered her support for the time ahead. As she said goodbye, she made a statement that left me totally open mouthed. "There was a butterfly fluttering about where we sat in the church, a red Admiral I think. Its early for butterflies isn't it?"

March 18, 2009

So Much To Do

I really do have to apologise to everyone who has emailed and written to me. I am so unaware of time and it is passing so quickly. It is lucky that I have my mother staying with me at the moment as she is making note of where I am supposed to be or who is coming at any particular time. Cheryl I will be in touch when I have the things done that must be done now.
Cheryl had been editing Toms book as he wrote it and she will continue with that when I take up the task of completing it. Ian Cottier who was the headmaster of St.Ninians school has asked if he can proof read it when it is complete. I have taken him up on that and will know that there will be very few errors, if any when he has finished.
Yesterday I had to kick start myself into doing the tasks I have ignored over the past week, but which have to be done. I started by looking for the insurance which I couldn't find, only a document apertaining to the bank. That stressed me somewhat and I phoned up our insurance man who came to see me last night and he is sorting everything for me. It was a day for contacting various people to stop pensions/allowances etc that i wouldn't be entitled too. I just felt a little fragile yesterday after staying strong. Ann the hospice nurse came to see at lunchtime. Although Tom is not here now, i still feel I need to talk to her and find comfort in doing so.
I made some decisions acout Toms boat the Silverburn last week as well. It has been up for sale as Toms health failed, but I have decided to keep her. Young Chris, Toms captain will continue to look after her and take Toms brother Lenny out fishing. On really, really calm days when Chris isn't working, I would like to go to the Sugarloaf rock. It is a place I adore and I always feel like a female David Attenborough with all the birds diving around the boat and thousands standing on the ledges like little soldiers all chattering away. The cacophony of bird sound is something I can conjure up in my mind in an instant and it is magic. How could I sell the Silverburn anyway? Chris said he would love to sail the boat and look after her as he would feel close to Tom. He's an unbelievable young man who has been Toms captain since he was a young 14 year old. He spent the first week with Tom at Clatterbridge last year and inbetween treatments, he and Tom sailed on every boat possible on the Mersey, even the yellow duck. He was 20 last year and he made Tom very happy in that 1st week, doing the boys thing which i wouldn't have been able to do. We never had children, but Chris has been close to us as any son could be and so attentive.
Anyway, today I will have to go into Douglas and see one of the banks over Toms pension. I am also going to have to buy some clothes as I have lost so much weight that I was nearly at the end of my tether on Saturday trying to find something to fit. Eventually I found a suit I had put away in the spare room wardrobe. It was from my skinny days ro from when I did the weight watchers thing which worked for a short while. It was a suit I couldn't part with as I loved it and when everything else made me look like a female version from the film Big, the suit fitted perfect. Gordon Cringle the funeral director comes again tonight to find out what acknowledgements I want and to fill in more forms. I could do with a whole page to thank all the people I would like to thank.
I still feel Tom in my heart whilst all this is happening and as long as I don't allow myself to think of the physical loss, I can cope.
This is a poem Tom wrote to me when we were courting and I still have it on the original paper he typed it on. I don't think he actually composed it, but that matters not.

It nestles deep within us all,
And patiently awaits the call,
Intangible, unheard, unseen,
The very reason for our being.

Unknown to me before you came,
Then passion took it's careful aim,
And set my sleeping spirits free,
You found the soul inside of me.

And if by chance my aim is true,
To find the soul inside of you,

Then you will know this love I feel,
Is not imagined or unreal.

So that our stars collide,
Together cross that great divide,
Into the world that we can't see,
You touched the world inside of me.

The happiness with you I gain,
Is equalled only by the pain,
Of loneliness when we're apart,
Which cruelly torments my heart.

And contemplate I cannot do,
The awful thought of losing you,
But hope and pray you'll always be,
Joined inside the soul of me.

This is now an additional verse that I will have on his headstone and it is truly how I feel.

Contemplate I could not do,
The awful thought of losing you,
But now I know you'll always be,
Joined inside the soul of me.

Nothing is Easy March 23, 2009

As the time goes by things aren't getting any easier, they are harder if anything. It is just over 2 weeks since Tom died and after the 1st week planning the funeral etc., it is really starting to hit home hard. I have no problem sleeping and I am grateful that my dreams have reflected my present position rather than waking up going through the shock all over again. Maybe that is because we have had 18 months of fighting the illness with a roller coaster of a ride throughout. I was of course aware of the situation throughout and when we reached 2009 I knew that it would happen this year. The chest specialist told me that he knew of nobody that had survived more than 2 years with what Tom had and all the statistics backed it up along with other local doctors. My mother is still with me making sure I keep appointments, eat properly, take my daily medication for asthma etc. and generally reminds me of what I was about to do before I got distracted. It seems like a mad world my mind occupies at the moment and I have avoided doing a blog because I have to motivate myself and I suppose I didn't want to show people the down side that I'm having now. I never did sort the banks out last week but that isn't so important yet due to the way we had our finances arranged. I have done very little to be honest, except a few phone calls here and there to make sure pensions and benefits were stopped. I took the cards down today as well. I waited until they appeared to have stopped arriving and now I have put them away for now. I will read them later along with the letters when I feel more able. All Tom's things are untouched and today I found myself burying my face in his cap and coat so I could capture his smell. In the 1st week he died I was playing his voice on a recorder that he used to save telephone no.s when he was on the phone. I played it the following week and instead of a warm feeling, I felt really bad. I will never hear his voice speaking to me or guiding me when I suggest something daft.
Last week I decided that Skipper was missing Tom too much and we needed another dog to keep him company, besides myself. I phoned for puppies that I had seen advertised but they had all gone. The lady was very nice and asked if I would like an older dog instead. That seemed an ideal solution as it would mean that the dog wouldn't be led by Skipper and we also agreed that if it didn't work out I could take the dog back. Thursday I went and collected a new addition to our family and she is a 7 year old little blue merl cocker spaniel bitch who has finished being bred. She's a little love and Skipper took to her straight away. We've had some problems as she decided she was going to be boss and Skipper allowed it until she went too far yesterday and he put her firmly in her place. He can now walk around the house without

being growled at and he has gained his position back in the pecking order. Suzie is her name and Tom would have loved her. He always would have liked a spaniel after the faithful dog he had when he was a child, which left his grandfather's to come and live with him. She did lead me a dance on Saturday when I took her and Skipper to the beach for the 1st time. All was going well when all of a sudden she took off. She had been so good walking at the side of me and I'm afraid she led me into a false security. I ran after her through every puddle going, up the pebble bank near Derbyhaven, over the golf course and I was just about at the end of my ability to keep going when I sank to my knees in a rough area of the golf course and pleaded with her to come back. Thank goodness she had a heart and returned to her new exhausted owner. On went the lead and I walked her and Skipper back to the car along the main road. I had left my mother sitting in the car whilst I walked the dogs as it was a bit windy and it would have agravated her angina. As I approached the car after my cross-country run, she just looked at me, rolled her eyes and tutted. Apparently she had been highly entertained watching it all and didn't expect to see me too soon as she saw me disappear as a dot on the horizon scrambling with Skipper after my runaway pooch.
Yesterday I was walking along the Silverburn River thinking about the two dogs, about Tom and what he would have said if I'd have broached the subject of a pal for Skipper. In my head I was telling him that it was a great way of trying another dog with Skipper as I could always take her back. He then answered me "But you won't though will you?" That stunned me a bit as I never thought that way when I went for her, but he is totally right. He knew /knows me better than I know myself. No I won't! No matter what problems may transcend, I will find a solution and make it work. Suzie won't be going back and Tom is still talking with me as I walk the banks of the Silverburn if I listen and don't let earthly sorrows cloud my mind.

March 25, 2009 Black Swan

Well I've had a couple of days of absorbing nature and watching the birds busying themselves with spring. Yesterday I walked in the park with Skipper and Suzie and saw my first Treecreeper this year. I have normally seen them nearer to the entance to Poulson Park in the big trees with a seat round, but yesterday my sighting was at the top end all together. The chaffinches were singing their spring song and the place was alive with bird life. The rooks are feeding babies and any bread dropped in their area is rewarded by hearing the babies as they are being fed. Even the little wren is busy flitting here there and everywhere and it are definately not shy. I walked through the field a bit and watched 2 herons flying together and keeping a bit of a close eye on me. As I wended my way home, one heron sat in a tree in the park and the other heron flew on with its mates raucous call being heard for quite a way. The pheasants also called from beyond the field across the river and my every step was monitored by the hooded crows that I drop a little bread too on my walks. I love to watch them eat some and then go and bury some in the feilds. The daffodils are out on the riverbank now and spring is definately bursting forth.
Today I had to dash out to the doctors this morning to keep an appointment and then I called at Toms mums along with my own mother and had a cup of tea. When I arrived home it was a little busy with a few callers and I was really late doing my aviary and taking Skipper and Suzie out. I was dashing back from my walk as I had someone coming at 2 p.m. and as I came under the bridge near where I live on the Silverburn, I was met with a glorious sight. I couldn't get the dogs in quick enough and I picked up my camera. The shot is rushed, but what a beautiful bird a black swan is. I don't know where it has come from. All I know is that it was looking for food in the area that I put grain. I didn't disappoint it and put enough to keep her coming back I hope.
Through all the sadness I am feeling at the moment, this was something that excited me. I have never seen a black swan in the island before and this is beautiful. It's a young one I think.

March 30, 2009 Another Week Has Gone By

I keep meeting people who say they are reading my blog. I have to admit that I have not written as I don't want to depress people, but I was told by one that they want to know how I'm doing. I suppose I am doing OK, but it's hard to tell really. My mum is still here but she is going back on Thursday morning. I do feel ready to be on my own now and I have my sister Janet coming on Saturday evening for a week. That will be a week of walking and watching the birds. She's an avid twitcher. I love watching the birds, but its as I walk and if they happen to be there, that's a bonus and adds to a pleasurable walk. When Janet goes back I am then hoping to have some time on my own to find a new routine and get on with everything that is on the back burner. I must be improving as I am now looking at things that need doing and I am determined to give my aviary a good clean this weekend. I have kept on top of the birds, but I'm pretty keen on perch scrubbing and giving the birds a healthy environment. I have to spend some time to get things back up to scratch

and playing hunt the cockatiel nesting areas. Suzie the spaniel has settled in lovely and although Skipper has tried to maintain the upper paw, Suzie always manages to get her own way. That’s my girl. She's a treat to take out as she walks just behind my legs where as Skipper attempts to drag me. I've tried all the training methods but he is a bit of a sod and will choke himself before he will give in.
It will be Tom and my wedding anniversary next Friday. It would have been 18 years. When I first married Tom I was so happy, I kept thinking I would die. I didn't think it was possible to have so much happiness and for it to last. It was about 5 years before I settled down and realised that such happiness was mine and to the day he died, I kept that happiness. For the past year it has been accompanied by an awful sadness because I was going to lose him, but I had the happiness whilst I had Tom. Its strange how things feel for me at the moment. I'm sad that he isn't here with me and yet there is a secret happiness in me, as I know he is waiting for me. It is very hard to explain and I must say that hearing his voice is still very hard for me as that is the part of him I have lost and can never regain. When I am on my own again, I will have time to reflect properly. I have still to do the book and this is another task I can only do when I am on my own again. It is going to be very difficult as Tom was very optimistic when he was writing the book. I've tried to reflect on whether it is better to lose someone suddenly without warning or slowly with an illness. I would probably say that with a slow illness, there is time to say all the things you want to say and yoiu can't help but to plan ahead in your mind even though it is agony. Tom even gave me advice for when I was on my own. I was also able to ask him what he thought I should do about this and that. I cried whilst we did it and he held me, but at least I had the best advice any wife could have.
Can you feel the pain as I write this? That is how I'm doing to be honest. I'm strong most of the time and have this great love in my heart, but I try to block things so I don't feel this pain. The doctor said not to block things and others say cry if it makes you feel better. The problem is, if I have a good cry I feel like rubbish. My head aches, my nose is blocked and I still feel bad, so I try not to think if I can. I suppose there are lots of people who can identify with how I feel. I've also come out with a flippin itch that the doctor keeps giving me different things for. Antihistamine cream and tablets don't work and I'm on some that make me sleepy now, so I can only take them at night or my mother thinks she's staying with a zombie. I can scratch for Britain and nothing helps. It is a result of my bereavement and I am hoping I will find something to stop it eventually or people will think I'm lousy.
I have still to apologise to Dorothy, Long, Cheryl, Pauline, Elizabeth, James, Linda, Wendy, Eileen, May, Joyce, Sarah, Janine and anyone else I haven't mentioned who has emailed me and still not had a reply. I stress because I haven't replied and although it would be quicker to do so than stressing, I still cannot put my mind to it yet. Be aware that I am thinking of you all and in time I will be in touch.
Now I'm going to see what I can do to stop my itching. aarrggghhhhhhh!

April 2, 2009 Beautiful Weather

Yesterday was a lovely day and today is similar except with a slight easterly wind. I walked on Langness yesterday and the sea was like a millpond. The houses along Shore Road and the rocks where mirrored in the sea and it was so calm and peaceful. Only the sound from the occassional plane taking off broke my reverie. The skylarks soared above singing as they rose high into the sky and then dropped down to the ground as though the power was suddenly switched off from their wings. The tide was out and a young seal struggled onto a rock on the Castletown side of Langness. No other people or cars were there, so I was able to let Skipper run freely right to the tip. It’s amazing what thoughts come into a person’s head when they are walking alone like that. I thought of my 1st walk with Tom and how I felt shy holding his hand when I was just a friend. I thought about the planning we had done to teach him to cook and the joy on his face when he took his first casserole out of the oven. It was a recipe he got out of a braille magazine and it involved sausages, eggs, tomatoes, sliced potatoes and onions. I can't remember the details fully, but it was delicious and I was so proud of my domesticated husband who went out of his way to do as much as possible in the house whilst I was at work. I Brailled the cooker, the washing machine and anything else he thought he could manage. In our first house in St.Johns he even tried to vacuum and clean but we had a coal fire initially and the fireguard kept following him around the room. He only messed up once with the polishing and he polished everything with air freshener and spray furniture polish in the air. Not good for an asthmatic like myself!
I took my mother to the hairdressers in Castletown after my walk and I just hung around until she came out looking good. After a bit of lunch in cafe in Bank Street, I decided to take the dogs to Fort Island. The day was still nice and Skipper loves Fort Island. I don't know why really, as it doesn't have as much walking for a dog as Langness. Again it was beautiful and I couldn't help but look at things with future paintings in mind. John Corrin the butcher arrived with his dogs and Skipper had a good romp with them. That’s when I saw a side to Suzie I didn't know about. Everytime John’s dogs came and sniffed her, she screamed like she'd been murdered. Even Skipper was puzzled at that one.
Today I took my Mum to the airport and even though I felt I needed the space now, I did feel sad. I'm normally pleased

when people go back, but today I missed Tom badly. We used to be so chuffed to have ourselves to ourselves again and today it was me on my own. That was a first for me and I did break my heart for a while, even burying my face in a cushion that was in the place where Tom always sat. I could smell him on the cushion & decided I wouldn't be able to wash that for some while. It even felt like the last 18 years have been a dream and now I have woken up to reality. As I started to write this blog my young niece came online with MSN. Her name is Fi(ona) and she is 17. She is my sister Jacqueline's daughter and is at college. I told her I was doing this blog and how sad I was. She wrote *aww, it will be okay, you know he's always there with you*. It was the reminder I needed to buck me up again, but I didn't expect it from one so young. As I write this I have just remembered the song Tom requested to have sung at our wedding day. That will be 18 years tomorrow and I have a heart wreath to put on his resting place. Anyway, I have just looked on the Internet for the lyrics of the song and they are so apt for me now. He was such a wise man my Tom.

I'll Walk Beside You
I'll walk beside you through the world today
While dreams and songs and flowers bless your way
I'll look into your eyes and hold your hand
I'll walk beside you through the golden land

I'll walk beside you through the world tonight
Beneath the starry skies ablaze with light
And in your heart loves's tender words I'll hide
I'll walk beside you through the eventide

I'll walk beside you through the passing years
Through days of cloud and sunshine, joy and tears
And when the great call comes, though sunset gleams
I'll walk beside you through the land of dreams.

I just have to keep remembering his promise. x

A Bit of Everything April 8, 2009

Yesterday I went to Langness for our walk. I had my sister Janet with me and the two dogs. The drive through sleepy Derbyhaven was in itself interesting with cars and a couple of police cars parked along the grass verge that lines the road. I was obviously curious as I drove, but all I could see was a large vessel at anchor towards Douglas Bay. It was loaded with the concrete things that are used to shore up coasts etc from the seas. I presumed people were just watching it's progress as I decided it was probably going to discharge it's load at the new airport runway. As I'm writing this I'm doing so on a wing and a prayer that I get the nautical terminology right. Normally I'd ask Tom what the concrete things are called, but now I will have to fall back on Barbara speak. It drove Tom mad with my wotsits and things. Anyway, after a rather breezy walk at Langness, we were passing through Derbeyhaven again only to see activity on the beach and the large vessel still in the same position. I realise now that the vessel was probably waiting for the tide. The activity on the beach was the rescue of the porpoise. I dutifully parked as my sister requested and she shot off like an on the spot reporter, armed with camera and binoculars. I was happy to let her go on her own as I was going to see the pictures and the rescue was at a vital stage of getting the porpoise into a large blue bag/sling so the people rescuing it could give it a hand back into deeper water. To be honest, it was also warmer in the car as well. I was able to watch it carried and see most of what happened from a distance and it was great to see it swimming on its own going further and further into deeper water and then to safety. Janet was absolutely cockahoop to be in on something like that whilst over here and it will have been one of the highlights of her stay. She's a nature lover like myself.
I personally have been pretty well up and down as is to be expected, but I have to say that I have been having the odd bit of fun with mine and other friends Wii. I don't normally do games and such, but the Wii isn't half a great thing to have a laugh with. I haven't used it on my own as the fun wouldn't be there with one person, not unless you're trying to practice so you have the upper hand with your other mates when they come to have a go on the wiifit. Whether you are young or old, I can highly recommend it. Even if you're not very agile or fit, it has something for everyone and of course

it has everyone laughing. I can highly recommend it and you are welcome to call and have a play and a cuppa if you are passing.
Last Friday when I was a little down, I went up the river for a walk. It was an amazing walk and the river was alive with birds. The swifts had arrived and they were swooping through the air getting their quota of protein from the midges. There were goldfinches, blue tits, hooded crows, chaffinches, wrens, thrushes, blackbirds, herons, pheasants and many more. I have heard that the black swan that stayed for a few days was last seen at Scarlett. I didn't think he would be allowed to stay. The swans start nesting under the railway bridge soon and territory is declared and closely guarded. The river can also be a very cruel place at this time of the year. On my way home I disturbed 2 ducks in the park. A male duck was attacking another male and he was injured. If he ventured into the river, he would have been drowned. He couldn't walk very well and all the feathers had been plucked from his back. I managed to catch him and I put him in a secluded part of my hen shed. He was in shock, so I left him quietly for the night. The next day he was still alive and so I got in touch with a lovely lady and her husband from Gansey who are brilliant at looking after injured or orphaned wildlife. They came immediately for the duck and decided he would recover well in time and they would release him when he was ready. I asked about a small duckling they picked up from me a few yers ago that have been in the beak of a heron or seagull. It was questionable at the time whether it would recover, but I was pleased to hear that it did and had flown the nest some time ago. It is lovely to know people like them who give of their time and turn up in an instant to help a distressed bird. I haven't that expertise and at the moment I haven't the mental strength to do it. I can look after the birds in their own environment, administering medicines in bread etc when they are in need and feeding them. I've rambled enough now. The very birds that I am talking about are all waiting for their feed as well as my hens, aviary, dogs and of course, Orry my African Grey.
Love to you all.
Barbara

Easter and Things April 13, 2009

Trying to think up a title for a blog and the opening lines take more time than the actual blog itself. Tom always stuck to the date and advised me to do the same which I may do yet. He also gave me a tip to starting and ending a blog which I haven't managed yet either. He said to start with something topical and in the case it would be something like - "I remember an Easter where I got us both in a very dangerous situation!" Then Tom said that he would then talk about other things as he had gained the reader's attention and they would keep reading as they wanted to know what happened and at the end of the blog he tell the story. Maybe I'll try that today,
Anyway, I have had a nice Easter weekend. My sister was with me until Saturday teatime and then I have been on my own and OK. Whilst Janet has been over, I have taken her on a different walk each day. Last Friday I took her up the Silverburn as far as Ronaldsway. The 1st thing to note is that the cows are back. They stayed across the river and so we were able to avoid contact. The swallows had also arrived and despite the swifts being earlier, the swallows seem to herald the start of spring/summer properly. The blue bells are about to burst into colour, along with the wild garlic. I stopped at the gate near the waterfall and pointed out a herons nest. A parent sat preening and although the young weren't visible, their call could be heard quite clearly. It is like something from a building site in the distance.
On Janet's last day I took her to Scarlett. It was another beautiful day and we walked as far as the fields with the sheep. We saw an early butterfly there and a few bees as well as the birds of course. Again it was another lovely walk and a fitting end to Janet's stay with me. As I left her later at the airport, a lump came into my throat, but I managed to stay dry eyed. As I was leaving the airport I spotted a lone Manx Tails amongst the magazines. I picked it up as I thought it would come in handy to pass onto family, but I looked at "Toms Farwell" before I went through the doors. I read the passage I had written as I couldn't remember what I had done at the time. There I read the optimism I had felt when Tom died that he would be with me on many more walks and in my heart. With that, my spirits lifted and I said "Right Tom, we're on our own again." and I went home to my dogs and Orry.
I went to bed early Saturday night as I had arranged to meet a nurse I had become a friend, at Douglas Head for a sunrise service. I'd never been to one and it sounded great. It also meant a busy day and no time to mope. I set my alarm to 5 a.m and was mortified I'd oversleep. I didn't have Tom to wake me, but I needn't have worried as he has Skipper well trained in that. I arrived at Douglas Head at 6.10 and the cars were right down the road. Ann and I had a good spec for the sunrise and the service. The Salvation Army band accompanied the hymns and it was a beautiful sunrise over the mountains of Cumbria. The service only lasted 1/2 hour and then a great breakfast was served in the Salvation Army hall. It was well worth attending. From there I went to Langness with the dogs and had another beautiful walk with the skylarks rising and falling as they sung. A stonechat sat on a gorse bush and cracked out his call like two

pebbles being hit together, hence the name. I arrived home at 9 a.m and fed the ducks, hens etc and uncovered Orry who had slept through it all. Later I picked Toms mum up and we met Toms Brother Lenny, his wife Rosie and nieces Alice and Becky at the Sound for lunch. Needless to say I rested in the afternoon and took the dogs through the fields at the side of the Silverburn in the evening. That was a big mistake! Suzie is a roller and now the cows have arrived, she found plenty to roll in and she made sure it was well and truly finished off by topping off the ooze with a roll in the dust afterwards. My bath looked a disgusting mess after I bathed her and I spent more time trying to make the bath look like something I to would like to get into to!
Yesterday I put my alarm on again as I decided I must get back into early mornings as that's the best time of the day. I'm afraid when it went off, I couldn't stop it soon enough and cuddle back under the covers. Any plans I made yesterday I cancelled and I spent the afternoon dozing. I obviously needed it and felt much better for it. I walked Langness in the morning and kept to my vow not to walk the fields whilst the cows are there and so last night I did the beach. I'd have to say I was perturbed when I saw Suzie rolling in the seaweed, but it was nice and fresh. My calls could be heard all over Derbeyhaven when the dogs came across a dead rabbit near the golf course. I escaped having to bath Suzie again thank goodness. I know it's not good for her coat, but I couldn't live with the smells she covers herself with!
Well. I've waffled long enough and daren't make this blog any longer. I'm going to have to tell the story of Tom and my experience in the next blog. Toms theory worked for him because he was a bloke. It could never work for me. I can hear him now saying "Will you get to the point."
My sister attempted to get a photo of the dogs and I with Orry. It was a nightmare, but I have added what appears the be the best.
Bye for now.

Attached thumbnail(s)

April 21, 2009

Today is certainly a change from the weather we've been having. It isn't raining, but I have woken for quite some days now to brilliant sunshine. Last week was a very mixed week. I used it to catch up with a few people that had been sidelined whilst I had my Mum and Sister staying with me. I'm afraid I'm still eating out a lot and can't remember when I last cooked a dinner. I suppose I will settle down in time, but I have to go with things for now. Last Thursday I went to the bank in Douglas and had Tom's name taken off the account. I still have one bank left to do it with, but at least I've made a start. I did a bit of shoping in Douglas afterwards with my friend Eileen. We had a good time and laughed quite a bit. Did I feel guilty? No. Tom would want that. I'm afraid the tide turned after that though. Later on that evening I went to bed early and gazed at our wedding photo on the way. The damn burst and the pain and loss was unbearable as the tears flowed. The next morning was no better and probably much worse. I had to call on another friend, Karron, to come and do my aviary as I was beyond doing anything but sobbing. The hospice nurse came as she had been as a follow up since Tom died and she just talked and explained that this is what they'd all been waiting for. It was all part of the grieving process and it had to happen sooner or later. With having people staying with me, it had delayed the process. My head pounded with all the crying and I then realised all the stages of grieving I had been going through that I wasn't aware of. Numbness, anger, intense sadness and then a letting go. The thoughts of letting go made me even worse. Accepting that Tom had actually gone. I know he died, as I had held him in my arms all through the night and the next morning in our bedroom, until he went. But now the actual reality of living my life out without him took on a new, depressing meaning. The nurse asked me what would Tom say to me if he was here. He would have just put his arm around me and let the tears come, as he would know it had to be done. Then he would gently speak to me and explain that he would like to be with me also, but it cannot be and so we have to make the most of what we have. He will be waiting where time doesn't exist and he would hope that the time we are apart is not as long as the time we spent

together. That is what he said when he was alive and the words still hold true. I bucked up throughout the day and I haven't sobbed since. It doen't mean it won't, but for now I am more settled with my situation.
On Sunday I met Toms Mum, brother Lenny and his wife Rosie in Port St.Mary golf club for dinner. I can highly recommend it. As I sat there eating, I heard snipets of conversation from the next table. I heard the words 'Read', 'Blog' and it was followed by 'always positive', 'never felt sorry for himself'. I knew instinctively it was Tom they were talking about. I thought about it afterwards and decided that Tom always tried to turn a negative into a positive. I'm going to try and do the same. Yesterday was a beautiful morning and I awoke with a spring in my step. Toms mum has had real problems walking with a very painful knee. I phoned the doctor at 8 a.m. and got her an appointment. I looked out of my bedroom window and watched a small floack of beautiful goldfinches flitting from branch to branch in the garden. There were lots of other birds, doves, blue tits, starlings, robins, chaffinches, blackbirds, thrushes, PIGEONS, and my own aviary birds adding to the mellay, but the colours of the goldfinch stand out and are so beautiful. I even brushed off my brass cornet (short trumpet) and played a few tunes. I hadn't touched it for 18 months. I phoned a couple of friends, Pauline and Ray Cregeen and asked if they fancied an afternoon sitting at Langness in theirs and mine camper. So yesterday afternoon I took Toms mum out with me to Langness and we all enjoyed dinner cooked by Pauline and cream scones baked by Toms mum Nel. Nel is nearly 82 and a wonderful example of how to cope with all life thows at you. She has lost 2 sons and her husband, and she is brilliant. Of course she feels it, but she manages so well. Nel had a little sleep in my little camper afterwards and loved her afternoon out. I made the mistake of putting on a pair of shorts and you could have played dot to dot on my goose pimples. It was a little sea mist that chilled the air a little, but my white legs haven't seen the light of day for quite some time, jeans being the preferred dress attire. There are a lot of nesting birds at Langness now and it’s all very lively. Tom would have loved the curlews and the lapwings calling yesterday. Never mind, I managed to let his mum sleep with the sounds around her that she won't hear in her home and it was so peaceful as well.
Today I have to see the chest specialist this afternoon and Nel has to have xrays on her knee and hip to find the cause of her pain. We'll have a cuppa in Spill the beans cafe at the hospital and we will enjoy each other’s company and support each other.
I hope you all have a good day and I promise in my next blog I will lighten up and do some story telling.
Love
Barbara

April 23, 2009 A Milestone

Yesterday was something of a milestone for me. It is over 12 months since I was at work. I couldn't manage my job as a senior analyst/programmer at Zurich and cope with Tom’s illness at the same time. I was so stressed and anxious, I was put on the sick. I missed the people I worked with, but there wasn't any real time for dwelling on it. I had a bigger task on my hands and to even think about work was enough to cause some tears. I knew that the next time I would be at work, Tom would be gone and it was too painful to contemplate.
Anyway, yesterday I met my new Team Manager and a work mate in *Spill the Beans* for a chat and to keep in touch with all that has changed. I was happy that I didn't get emotional when I met them and after half and hour, I felt I could possibly face going into the building and meeting people. I wasn't sure how I would be, but I felt I had to take that first step. I loved seeing everyone and rather than just sticking with my own team, I went through the whole building and reaquainted myself with people I have written software for. At times I had to pause to collect myself, but I left feeling quite pleased. I felt I could have sat down and looked at a few things there and then, but luckily I have quite a few people supporting me who hold me back with good reason. One good day doesn't mean I am ready. Slowly does it, but at least I have made that step and I have awakened my thirst for programming. I always loved doing that work and felt it was a bonus to be paid for doing something I enjoyed so much. Zurich has to be the best firm I have ever worked for. I have been there over 11 years and they have been superb in supporting me with Tom’s and my illness. They really are a firm that takes care of their staff.
Anyway, my garden has aquired another lodger at the moment. A big old goose was getting quite a thumping by a few other geese on the riverbank at lunchtime. I have treated this goose before as he has a bad limp sometimes and the vet gave me some anti-inflamatory medicine that is given to cats and dogs. I fed him the medicine for a few weeks whilst he still lived on the river and he got better. Today because he is unsteady and unable to defend himself, is the first time I have actually brought them in the garden. He's big enough for the hens to ignore. If it had been a duck, they would have

ganged up on it, but Mr. Goose is safe enough. I'll see how he goes and when he is stronger I'll put him back on the river. Anyway, that’s a little bit of news from me today. It’s a bit misty and damp and I've had a right lazy day.
I hope you are all well and enjoying the spring.

May 4, 2009 Like a Mother Duck

It seems ages since I did a blog. I had an Aunty over and I never really got time to sit and contemplate. I am on my own again and will be for 3 weeks when my niece and her boyfriend come over. After that I am looking to get a good run of no visitors so I can work at sorting out a new daily routine. Tom has been gone 2 months, but I have only spent 2 weeks on my own and it wasn't long enough to work things out, not least because that was the time I did my hardest grieving. I have sorted things out in my mind now and am moving forward, as Tom would have wanted me to and in pretty much the same way. When Tom was worried or upset, he would sit quiet with no distractions (radio/TV) and think everything through and sort things out in his mind. When he was told his cancer was back, this was such an occassion. He needed the time and space to do it and I had to leave him to that part as only he could work it out. After a time he said "Right, thats it. I've sorted that out nd I'm OK now." He wasn't OK obviously, but he had come to terms with the news and decided on how he was going to handle it. I am in that position now. I haven't got Tom with me, but I am going to try so hard to use his methods to cope. We cannot be together now; he isn't going to come back. I am on my own in this world and I now have to make the best of what I have. That means that I will stop running around like a scalded cat trying to busy myself and spend endless hours wondering what I am going to do. Now is a time for quiet reflection and acceptance. As for what I am going to do, I am going to live each day and see what develops. I am sure the remaining part of my life will be used to help people, but in what form, I am just going to wait and see.
I have been trying to help a young lad out the past few weeks. He is 17 and desparate for a job. I can't give him a job as such, but I can let it be known that a keen young man who cleans my paths and camper, tidies my garden and any other little jobs that need doing, is so keen to work that he gets up at 7 each morning so he is in the habit should work come his way and has knocked on many doors to no avail at the moment. I'm sure that something will happen for him soon. I have let him use our computer to practice his car theory test. Tom and I liked to try and give young people a bit of help where we could and I suppose I am just continuing in a way.
I had a knock on the door last night just as I was going to bed at around 10 p.m. I wondered if I should ignore it or answer it, but Skipper was going ballistic and I thought I'd decide when I looked through the door window. Anyway, it was my young helper and he was apologising profusely for knocking at such a late hour. He had quite an entourage of friends with him, all eagerly wanting to be in on the conversation. "We found this duckling running around the middle of the road on it's own." he said. One of his friends said that they wanted to keep it but my young helper wouldn't let them and insisted they brought it to me. I explained that it would die if they just took it home and fed it bread and milk and it would need to be kept warm and fed right. I told them I would pass it on to a lady who does a grand job of looking after stray duckings at this time of year. They went and I was left with a shivering little fluffy duckling. "Great!" I thought to myself. Now I had to try and keep it alive until the next day and I wasn't sure what I was going to do. Well I may not be much help in finding young people employment, but when it comes to knowing whom to ask about different species, I come into my own. I phoned a friend up who has just started a pet consultancy business and she told me exactly what to do. Anyone on the Island that has a small animal or tortoise may like to log on to Joanne’s site and see what she can provide or help you with. http://jotherabbitadvisor.webs.com/ Anyway, I got a small box and put a heated pad in the bottom along with one of my jumpers. I settled my little duckling down, put the box in the office and then I went to bed. It wasn't long before the peep, peep, peep from the duckling caused me to check and there it was doing the wall of death around the office. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine a duckling was able to move at the speed of light. It was caught when it got in the computer wires and back in the box it went. This time I put an iron on the lid to make sure it couldn't jump its way out. It lasted all of about 10 minutes before the peep, peep, peep started again. Taking no risks, I checked again. It was on it’s way down the stairs and had come out of the tiniest hole imaginable. That was it! I brought the box in my bedroom and set it down on the bed at the side of me. I also put a cover over the box lid and all was well. I woke at around 1 a.m and did a little check. There it was, snug as a bug in my jumper and fast asleep. At around 4 a.m I woke again, but decided not to check as I didn't want to disturb it. I lay there for a while and then all of a sudden, something furry moved from under my arm. I nearly shot out of bed thinking a mouse or something had found its way in. No, there as snug as anything was my little duckling with its head on my pillow and using me as a hot water bottle. It had escpaed its box again, but this time it found a heat source and snuggled up. That’s how it stayed until I got up at 7.30. Now you can see how I put a whole new meaning to being like a mother duck. Come to think of it, it’s like a mother hen isn't it? The little duckling ate this morning and spent its remaining time with me tucked under my jumper as I went about my jobs. It has been taken now and put under another mother duck (a real one) who has 5 duckings and in time

will be let out into the wild.
I've certainly made up for my missed blog. Hopefully I will do a bit more this week, but I now have to feed my animals. My resident wild goose is doing OK and not showing any signs of wanting to leave yet. All is well with my lot on the banks of the Silverburn River. X

May 5, 2009 Talk About Him

Yesterday I was at the doctor's for a check up. I'm not as good as I thought I was when I wrote the other day. What others see when they speak to me is someone who is a bit all over the place. Certainly not ready for work according to to the medical people and I have another note. I'm a bit embarrassed that I'm not getting it together long enough to be 'normal' or 'getting on with life' but they keep explaining that the sort of relationship we had means that it is going to take some time. Not only because of the magic relationship, but also because I was a 24/7 carer for over a year and a carer of sorts throughout our relationship. Time and talking about Tom is all that is going to help. I do talk about him in a way, but I have been doing it without allowing myself to actually feel it. Not allowing my mind to dwell. More matter of fact than the man that still lives in my heart. Anyway I must start to remember Tom and the life we had, the things we have done, instead of trying to block it. For me it is much easier to share my memories with you than it is to talk to one person. I can talk to you anytime I want, day or night and share the happy times we had. There were sad ones as well, but in the main, life was happy. Very, very happy.
This morning I was remembering the time we put the tent up at the Point of Ayre. We bought a 6 man frame tent as I heard they were easy to do and I always had to look for easy if it meant I was going to do it. What a nightmare! I wouldn't have managed it at all if Tom's friend Geordie hadn't been the lighthouse keeper at the Ayres. For one I would never have reached anything with my 4'11 stature and working out the instructions was like doing the Krypton Factor. My brain just doesn't do it. Anyway, up it went and Tom, me and the dogs (Bessie and Escort the guide dog) settled down for a weeks camping. In actual fact, the idea was that I would go to work in the week and come back at lunchtimes. We lived in St.Johns at that point and I worked in Ramsey. It seemed a great idea and I'd be seeing so much more of Tom with him being so close. We placed the tent on the flatest bit of ground we could find and sheltered from one side by the wall around the lighthouse buildings. All was well until the gale arrived. One by one the flimsy wire pegs popped out of the sandy ground and Tom and I sat for a whole afternoon on the bottom of the tent at the back with the radio between us listening for the shipping forecast and praying for the wind to abate. We hung onto the tent for grim death and with each gust we were lifted off the ground and down again. Hours later it did calm down and we could relax. No one could help us whilst that went on. We just had to ride out the storm and hang on. Our friend Geordie hadn't been idle all that time though. He turned up with massive iron pegs that he had made for us whilst we hung on. The pegs were still still red hot from Geordie bending and making a good spike on the end of them. The rest of the week was great. The sun was out the whole week. I tottered off to work in my high heals each day whilst Tom sat and listened to his radio and talked to whoever passed, and the dogs just ran and ran. In the evenings Geordie and his wife Margaret would join us for a few drinks and occassionally more than a few and it was a great week. We only went home when we thought Escort had something up with his eyes. He was a Golden Retriever but his eyes started to look like a bloodhound's, blood red and droopy. When we got home Bess and Escort slept for 3 days. They were absolutely pole axed and that was when we first realised that Escorts droopy eyes were the equivalent to a human with bags under their eyes. It was probably that week that the idea of moving closer to Ramsey came into our minds. Either way, we never went camping in the tent again. The instructions blew away in the gale and the thought of erecting it on my own was enough to stop me. A vicar in Port St.Mary bought it as I remember and we eventually went on to buy a little Bambi motorhome. Tales of the Bambi to follow later.
It is now time for me to sort my animals and birds out. I hope you don't mind me unburdening myself on you and reminiscing. You are going to help me through by just listening and being there.
This is Barbara on the banks of the Silverburn, with lots of friends out there.

May 7, 2009 What a Nightmare-Life Insurance

I have felt for a while that I'd like to warn people about taking good health for granted and not having an 'in case' plan. Tom and I invested some money around 3 years ago and pretty well tied it up. We were asked would we need it before the time was up and we were both adamant that with our salaries we would be fine. Ilness wasn't something we worried about and death never entered our heads. We were just planning on working out the last few years now before retirement and I don't think a day went by when we didn't mention or talk about it getting closer and what we'd do then.

Walk, drink tea in the night and not worry about the day, out in the motorhome, off on the boat, sail to America on a banana boat etc. etc. Tom was as fit as a butcher's dog running his own business and I was working for Zurich and would be until I retired or they retired me. That was it. It was all set in stone and everything was going to be honky dory. You all know the rest, but what a shock and were we prepared? Well sort of. We had insurance but it was held by the bank against the mortgage in case either of us died. Before Tom died he told me not to forget we had the insurance and that although it was set against the house, it was now illegal for the banks to do that. What he didn't realise was that we had signed the document when it was legal and so it still stood. By rights the bank could keep the little insurance there was against the mortgage. My broker checked with the insurance company and they said my policy was held by the bank and any monies would have to go to them unless I got a letter of release from them. I phoned the bank and explained that they had as much of my money locked into a 5 year investment plan, as I owed on the mortgage and if they kept the insurance money I would have no money to pay the funeral. They were very good and they then took up my case with the insurance company and agreed that the money would go to me and sent them a letter of release and a copy of the death certificate. Today I was still trying to find out when I would be paid out as I have a funeral bill sitting on my table and nothing has been forthcoming from the insurance company. Because the bank had my policy I didn't have the policy number and my broker was away, so I tried to trace it myself in order to gee them up a bit. Scottish Provident has a telephone number on the island, but life policies are now owned by a company across. Eventually I did find the correct company, which is now called Phoenix in Glasgow. I explained I needed my claim sorting out as it has been over 2 months and I have to pay for the funeral. I started to get somewhere at last. I was told that they wanted the death certificate as they had been sent a copy by the bank but wanted the original. They had sent a letter to the bank requesting it on the 29th April. I was mad, as I could have provided that straight away and all the beaurocracy with them writing to and from the bank, was stopping it getting sorted. I said I would send a certificate straight away and then asked how long it would be before I received a settlement. "Oh anything between 2 weeks and 6 months, depending on the cause of death and circumstances," the boy answered. If there is anything I don't need at this time, it's stress and I'd have to say that I'm pretty stressed out with this lot. I phoned my broker's secretary and she told me that the original death certificate had been sent to them 5 weeks ago and they had sent it back! She said she was going to root out my file and phone them. I haven't heard back from her yet, so I'm sitting here pretty well bemused about the whole thing and for the moment I have done nothing. Maybe I'll try and sort something tomorrow, who knows! These are the times when I say Tom would have known his rights, who to contact, how to get things moving. This is a bit like one of Tom's beefing blogs really, only there is no resolution at the moment.

Tomorrow's another day. Lets see what it brings. I hope the gale moderates as Sean and Wendy from London are coming to see me tomorrow. They are friends from Tom's blog and they would like me to take them round Langness and point out a few birds to them. I'm just hoping the ones I see are the ones I know the names of. You can bet you bottom dollar a 'little brown thing' (as Bill Oddy calls them) will bob about and I won't have a clue. Thank heavens for the Skylarks, they entertain people walking round there for the 1st time with their sweet song which can be heard when they are a just a speck in the sky. Anyway, I didn't intend telling the world about my insurance problems, but when everyone tells me they were paid out in a couple of weeks etc etc, I just wanted people to see its not all smooth going and to try and cover every angle.

That's it for now.

May 13, 2009 Keeping Busy

I'd have to say I'm much better this week than I was last. Sean and Wendy came over as planned and they had a hand in getting me out and about again. I had a bug last week that probably didn't help my mood, but that has now gone and I am much more focused and not taking ages to get things done with the lack of concentration I have had for quite some time now.

It was a bit of a shock to realise how much knowledge Sean had of the bird world and apart from showing him the birding sites and Ravens nest on Langness, I hung on his every word as he trotted out the names of the birds. Wendy, Sean and I had a good time together and I m looking forward to their return later in the year. We may even get down to the Sugarloaf Rock on Toms boat the Silverburn if the weather is nice. They took loads of pictures and they sent me a couple. I will include a picture he took of one of my canary's nests and you never know, he may send some more of the 100's he took.

Saturday I decided that on the Sunday, instead of eating out as we (Toms Mum, brother Lenny and his wife Rosie and my nieces Becky and Alice) had each Sunday since Tom died, I would cook dinner for us all. It was an ambitious task considering how dozy I have been for months, but I felt it may help me to concentrate my efforts. I have also become firm friends with Ann the Hospice nurse who supported Tom and I from the start of his cancer through until the end. We

meet early each Sunday morning and go on a different walk lasting around 3 hours. I enjoy Ann's company and we view the birds, wild flowers and anything else that takes our interest on the way. This also means that Skipper and Suzie get to a different location as well. Anyway, last Sunday I had done the walk before I cooked the dinner and also had the aviary to do. It all came off for me and I was pleased I had managed it. It's only a simple thing, but with the way my mind has been, it was yet another milestone. It seems to have set me up for the rest of the week so far.
Monday I got stuck into cleaning my aviary and got on top of that task.
Yesterday the Vicar that did both Tom's and his Father's funeral came to see me. She is a lovely woman and she seemed quite at home with me and has been a great help. No doubt we will meet more in the future.
This weekend I am going to the wildlife park to see the birds of prey. I went a few years ago with Rosie my sister in law and it was brilliant. I got to hold a Golden Eagle and Tawny Owl, the feathers of which were the softest I have ever felt. There are lots of different kinds of birds and we get to be pretty well hands on with them and then watch the display afterwards, which is quite something. Last time we were also allowed to hold and stroke a python and were taken on a guided tour of the park. I don't think it will be quite the same this year, but there is a hot lunch and I am looking forward to it. This year I have persuaded a few more to accompany Rose and I and so there will be 7 of us altogether on the VIP tickets.
A couple of my friends (Ray and Pauline) are camping at Sulby in their motorhome this week, getting used to it before they go away on holiday and it is also getting them away from the house and giving them a much needed rest. It still brings back my first memory of the Bambi Motorhome we had. We bought it when we moved to Ramsey and we used it all over the place, Ireland, Scotland, England etc but mostly on the Island. We would often go to Castletown for the weekend and stay in the camper. Tom also liked us to go to the Ayres and I was to ship spot for him. I became so proficient that I could spot ships like the Saga Moon and River Lune miles away by their shape. The first trip we ever did in the Bambi was to the Ayres just to suss it out and have a cuppa. I can remember it like yesterday. We made a cup of tea, took the dogs for a walk and had a sit for a while. The time came to leave and as I set off I learned the first rule of a motorhome; making sure everything was put away and shut up properly. AS I set off, the cupboard doors opened and everything flew out onto the floor. "Just a minute." I told Tom and I went to secure everything. Then I was ready to set off again. This time we were going nowhere as the wheels spun in the sand. "Oh no" I cried, "We're stuck in the sand" and I was about to get out of the Bambi to try and push it when Tom said he would push and I was just to accelerate. It didn't take hardly anything at all and the motorhome shot forward and was free. I sat there with the handbrake on waiting for Tom to come and he was taking his time. I presumed he was taking the opportunity to have a quick widdle as I sat working out the radio etc. Eventually Tom opened the door and he shouted quite out of breath, "What are you doing?" "I'm just waiting for you to get back in why?" I did think he looked a bit red in the face and breathless. He didn't realise the vehicle was free and he'd been pushing like mad the whole time I sat there with the handbrake on. I thought he would have felt it shift to be honest. My excuses didn't really appease him and he was quiet for the rest of the way home. I'm not sure if that because he was totally knackered or because he was annoyed. Either way it certainly stuck in my mind. :-)
I'd better go and walk the dogs now and have a bit to eat.
Have a nice day everyone. This is Barbara on the banks of the Silverburn, reminiscing.

Keeping Control May 22, 2009

Today my neice Beth and her boyfriend Lee have arrived this morning for a week’s holiday from Wigan (or there abouts). Beth has been here many times, but for 17-year-old Lee, this is a first. I'd have to say his geography isn't very good and he doesn't know much about the Isle of Man. He thought he was coming to somewhere the size of Langness and I won't embarrass him by telling you some of the questions he has asked about it. I could have a field day kidding him on, but I won't. Hopefully by the time he goes home next Friday, he will be more informed and will have enjoyed himself.
Last week I received another email from Wendy with a few more photos that her boyfriend Sean had taken of some of my aviary birds whilst he was over. I will attach the pictures. She also had some other news as well. Sean proposed to her in Peel Castle and so it turned out to be quite a weekend for them both. They are a lovely couple and have so many interests and hobbies. I think they should start their own blog as well, as they do so many interesting things and take part in re-enactments in England and abroad I think, though I may be wrong. He is also a keen sailor and Wendy does some ancient weaving/tapestry type thing that is little known. I can't remember what it is, but I hope she'll put me right.
This week has been a not so good one for me emotionally. I have no one to talk me out of things now or talk through schemes that may be in my head and give me the fors and againsts. I'm a bit of a loose cannon and I suppose in some ways I have managed to recognise I'm acting impulsively or throwing myself into too many things and have now got to

think more. I decided last weekend that another African Grey parrot would be a good idea. I decided Orry would have someone to play with and if anything happened to me, he wouldn't feel it as bad as he'd have his new pal. I saw a 10-month-old parrot and decided Yes; I will have it, but not quite yet for financial reasons. Yes folks, the insurance money is still not through and I have been waiting a form for the past 2 weeks, which I have to sign to release the money! I'm going off track but thought I'd give you a quick update. Don't ever get insured with PHOENIX. Heartless sods! Anyway, my sister Janet thought I'd lost the plot when I told her another parrot was coming. She asked me had I though of how it would affect Orry, the new parrot, me etc etc. What if they didn't get on? What if Orry got stressed? What if they bonded etc etc? I was adament and decided she didn't know what she was on about. Then just to make sure, I sent Birdi and email and she said I'd have to check this, that and the other and if they didn't get on I could take them out separately and so it went on. I then checked on the Internet and quite frankly, by then I was mortified. It would be something I could do if I wasn't grieving, but at the moment I couldn't do with all the upheaval and the chance of upsetting the equalibrium. Orry could end up stressed and plucking and I just can't cope with any extra stress or anxiety. Then the thoughts of, "If Tom was here we would have talked about it before I did it. He would have pointed out the negatives as well as the positives." All those thoughts just make me so sad and it’s all so true. I have been impulsive and now that there is only me, I can do whatever I want, if I want. I also know that it’s also a reaction to the grief. Anyway, a close friend explained the situation and the new parrot is not coming. I just couldn't cope.

Suzie the spaniel has seemed to have eyesight problems, but it only shows itself in dim light. She's petrified to walk around in the dark. I had her at a vetinary eye specialist yesterday and after a good bit of testing, I was told she her retinas are wearing and she will become blind. Absolutely nothing can be done about it and she may get cataracts, which would be caused by the problem, but not to do anything about it as she will still be blind. The only thing we are testing for now is how slow the deterioration is. If it is slow she will adjust better. Anyway, I have plenty experience. In the past, whenever I saw a blind dog or a dog missing a leg, Tom would say, "The dog is OK. It is only our perception of how it is, but the dog is absolutely fine." Hopefully Suzie’s condition will be slow and Skipper and I can make her life as pleasable as possible. There are lots of sounds and smells up the Silverburn and she'll get lots of love.

I know people like to here some of the tales about Tom and at the moment it isn't easy to recall them although there have been so many. PollyParrot tried to get me to tell one some months ago and I didn't but I will now.

Tom always wore a top under a jumper or fleece and whilst he was ill, I noticed he had a blue t'shirt that I couldn't identify under a jumper. It was just one of those things were I looked and asked myslef "I wonder which t'shirt that is?" as I didn't recognise it. Later that day he seemd to be a bit bad with his chest and I asked him would he like me to take him to Mandoc. He was on chemo at the time and we thought we'd be better safe than sorry and off we went. As we sat in the surgery the doctor asked him to take his jumper off so she could listen to his chest. He left his t'shirt on, as it would be easy for the doctor to lift it up. His back was to me, but I was fairly sure I recognised it then. The doctor checked Tom out and then she went out of the room for something. I looked properly then and I was mortified. Tom sat there totally unmoved as I told him he had my nighty on. It had a little black cat, a teapot and a sheep I think. Even when we got home he sat the whole evening having a few drinks with his pals and he hadn't changed. I wondered what they would have thought if they'd known he was sat drinking and telling anecdotes with his wifes nighty on. We so many laughs throughout our lives I could probably continue for ages. My only problem at the moment is that I cannot recall very much. Again, it’s all part of the process. I do miss him so very much and I also know that there many more people whose lives he touched, feeling the same.

I'd better go now and see to my visitors. I will do another blog soon and report on our day out last week at the wildlife park with the falcons.

Love from Barbara on the banks of our beautiful Silverburn River.

Just Daydreaming May 24, 2009

The other day I came across another website that had mentioned Tom on it. It is the South Carolina fight against lung cancer newsletter. They had been using Tom as an inspiration to their patients and apparently doctors and nurses had advised their patients read Toms blog. I told a few friends about it and one asked if I felt sad reading it. I'd have to say I felt so proud and happy that he had reached people far and wide, probably giving them a lift in their fight with the deadly disease. I know a lot of cancer sites linked to the blog, but it was nice to read another persons comments on Tom when they had only followed his journey. There hasn't been much medical progress made with Toms particular type of cancer (SCLC) over the last 20 years and it still continues to take many lives. There is hope that a blood test will soon be able to identify patients with it earlier. When it is caught very early and an operation is possible that is the best possible chance of beating it. When Tom first died I told the Hospice Nurse I would be gutted if a cure was found now and then I corrected myself. No, I wouldn't want other people to suffer. I would want a cure or a way of identifying the illness

quicker. It is widely presumed that not as much research goes into Small Cell Lung Cancer due to the stigma surrounding it and smokers. There are people trying to change this around the world as there is now a percentage of non smokers affected. Let us hope that this happens soon. Clatterbridge and Liverpool University are at the leading edge and hopefully they and others around the world will come up with something soon.

On Sunday I dropped my niece and her boyfriend at Tynwald Mills and I decided to take the dogs for a walk in one of my old walking patches in St.Johns, Slieau Whallian (not sure about the spelling). It is a very steep hill in St.Johns for the off Island readers, but also a very thick forest. I used to run up Slieau Whallian on a regular basis with my dogs and used it as a means of regaining my fitness after I had most of my thyroid removed. The most beautiful way is to walk and appreciate everything you can see both in the forest and the view from it. I spent 10 years living at the bottom of it in a little cottage down a lane on the Patrick Road. It was and still is a magnificent sight. Anyway, more of that later and back to my walk. I used to start my walk from the Patrick Road and through a gate that I think the foresters use. On Sunday I gave myself a lift and started my walk from halfway up the hill by driving up the road at the side, the name of which escapes me, and parking in a lay-by opposite the stile into the forest. I walked along the path that runs above the fields and stood for quite some time recalling memories, listening to the cockerels calling to each other around the village and looking at the changes that had taken place. I could see my bedroom window in the cottage I had and then shared with Tom for the first 18 months of us being together. I won't tell you my memories there, but continue to the bottom of the garden where we used to sit on the riverbank that was owned by the cottage. So peaceful and absolutely gorgeous with Slieau Whallian as the backdrop. The river is the Neb and full of trout and salmon. We never fished it, but I certainly had the fish trained and they would jump for their bread each day and turn the river into what looked a boiling cauldron. Tom used to sit on the riverbank whilst I was at work and throw sticks in the river for the dogs to chase. He would have pop and cider tied with string to the bottleneck and to tent pegs on the river bank and he would have them floating in the river to keep them cool. He would torment me by phoning me whilst I was at work and tell me what a lovely day he was having. I would here the dogs splashing in the water and the glug, glug, glug of the bottle he had retreived from the river as he filled a glass, sipped and then give an appreciative, "haahh, thats nice." I loved him too much to feel peeved, though I did wish I were with him obviously. He didn't do much for my concentration at work. I saw the garage that used to house my old bangers and remembered the time I spent sleeping with my sister in the back of an old Austen Estate when both she and her boyfriend Carl (her husband now for 25 years), came over to stay at the same time as my brother John came over to stay on his honeymoon. It was all crazy as I had a one bedroomed cottage, but we would manage anyway we could in those days. We had an airbed in the back of the estate and it was a nightmare trying to sleep. Janet tossed and turned and the noise each time was like listening to velcro being ripped apart. "Will you keep still" I yelled at her. "If you stop snorning I will" came my young sisters retort.

I walked along the ridge and remembered the devastation that took place with rain and wind, which wiped out one of the paths that allowed me to walk up the hill very gradually. Rain had devastated most of the Island and caused so many properties to flood everywhere, including my own.

My eyes wandered to the houses that had appeared or expanded since I first bought the house and that small area now has quite a lot of large houses. It will still be peaceful for my friends who still live there. I looked at the field beneath the forest and remembered the horses that grazed there and the first time my dog Bess saw a horse. I have a picture of her sitting and gazing intently, with her collie ears pricked up as she watched them. Having no wish to try and ascend the hill like a mountaineer, I walked back across the ridge to where the rhodedendrums flower in the summer and peered into the pine needles at the bottom of the trees. Hedgehogs are common everywhere, but I remembered a time when I came across a hedgehog family all playing. The young ones were play fighting and tumbing down the slope beneath the trees, watched by their parents. I stood just feet away watching for quite some time and they were oblivious to me. Many a time there are occassions when we wish we had our cameras with us to capture a scene, but on each occassion like that, the memory is still there and I can replay the joy or beauty at any time. It is only sad because we can't show our friends and family and describing doesn't seem to tell the whole tale or explain the sheer beauty. I hope this isn't too boring for the reader!

I then went to ascend the next part of the hill. I have to expain that I wasn't in my normal jeans and trainers as we had been to the Marine in Peel for dinner with Toms family. I had given my legs an airing and was in gold. but thank goodness, flat sandles. Its certainly a good hike if you are wanting to improve your fitness and keep you heart and lungs in good fettle. My heart was thumping like anything and missing the occassional beat. Nothing to worry about, just more of the same required to get in condition. I was almost at the next flat walking section when my mobile rang which was Beth telling me they were ready to go home. I intend putting the right footwear on and doing the walk properly at sometime. It is possible to walk through to Barnell, which is another lovely place. I believe it can be difficult in places, but I am up for it.

Anyway, I have daydreamed long enough, Orry is shouting and I haven't uncovered him and I have a host of things to

do. Lee and Beth have fed the hens and ducks and are now walking Skipper. Suzie will only go with me, so she will be walked later.
Have a nice day everyone.
Love from Barbara on the banks of the wonderful Silverburn. I can never write that without thinking of Tom. How I miss him!

June 1, 2009

Well I've pondered a title long enough and have gone back to a date. My niece Beth and her boyfriend Lee went home on Friday. Lee now knows the Island is bigger than Langness, has buses and cars and even an airport, which is lucky for him being as he came over by plane. Sorry Lee, I just couldn't resist it. They had a good time and will be back again in the future.
The weather is gorgeous here at the moment. Not only the weather, but also nature seems to be at its best. The hawthorn trees are in full blossom and their perfume fills the air as I walk along the river, especially early in the morning or in the evening. Baby birds are present everywhere, being fed by their exhausted parents. I've seen a few scruffy little robins moulting as well. Butterflies are also plentiful at the moment. The hot spell we are having seems to have brought out the best in nature. Today I waited until quite late before taking Skipper and Suzie out on their walks due to the heat. I went to Fort Island with them and it was absolutely gorgeous. The sea was like a millpond and every rock was reflected in the sea. There were a few people out fishing and I'm sure that the migratory fish must be aound our waters now. The wild flowers Thrift and Campion blend together on the sea rocks to make a pretty sight, especially with the nesting gulls and Oyster Catchers complimenting the vision. Looking down into the sea, the seaweed was lazily reaching up to the surface and it was al so clear, nothing was obscurred from view. It was all so very pretty, peaceful and serene.
Last week I had to take Mr Goose to the vet’s. I have tried long enough to nurse him better and we weren't making any headway. I wondered how I was going to get him there, as I had nothing big enough, so I just stuck him in the back of the camper with a towel and went on my way. I sat in the vets with the big goose on my knee and a towel wrapped around him to save my clothes and catch any droppings. He was as good as gold and just sat whilst I stoked his neck. Other visitors were amused to say the least. Anyway, eventually our turn came and he was examined. The antibiotics I gave him weren’t the right one for bumble foot. To be honest its 99% always the one the vets use on birds, but trust me to have a 1% er. Anyway I have had to give him injections for 5 days and he's made a significant improvement. So much so that I stuck him in a baby bath in the garden and he has been relishing a good bath each day since. He has also started running off when he see's the needle and last week he would have just looked and hissed.
After the vet seeing the gander on Wednesday, Friday I had to take a baby canary with a gash on its head. Unfortunately when another bird sees's blood, including its own parents; they can't help but pick at it. So my tiny baby canary also had the Katie the vet treatment. Along with Joanne the vet nurse who kindly held the baby, Katie put 3 micro stitches in the baby canary’s head after numbing it first. Katie said she thought it was the smallest creature she had done that on, but it was on a par with a mouse she did a stomach operation on. Anyway the baby did well and is hopping around the place with its stitches in.
For those who are wonderinghow else I am getting on, I would have to say that I am now in my 3rd week of weepiness. Little triggers start it and its got to such a point now that I try to work out if I've managed a day without. I've also been worrying about my memory as it’s shocking. Obviously I have been under a lot of stress and anxiety for the whole of Tom’s illness and it did affect me. The worst has happened and now I just have to deal with the consequences, but I wouldn't have thought that my memory could be affected so badly and also my ability to complete tasks without flitting from one thing to another. It still takes me an age to complete a task because I am distracted so much. I can't remember when I said I was meeting someone, what time and where. I have to write everything down and if I don't I am snookered. It has been going on for a while, but now besides the grief I feel, I am worrying that I am going to be slow and forgetful forever. Is it my age, the stress, depression or grief? I haven't a clue. Time will tell I suppose. Anyway, for people who have gone through or are going through the same, at least you know you're not the only one.
I'd better go now as its now a day later than when I started this blog.
This is Barbara in the middle of the night on the banks of our beautiful Silverburn.

Getting Along June 8, 2009

There are certain times of the year when the sea looks to be bathed in gold and it is when the seaweed turns a lighter colour and as the tide comes in it shimmers beneath the surface, shimmering like pure gold. That is how the sea has been for a few weeks now and that is what I saw as I went to Langness last week in my camper with the dogs. I decided that for the first time since Tom died, I would go out and make a cup of tea for myself and feel the serenity whilst the dogs mooched about. On my way there I marveled at two lapwings whooping and diving as they perceived danger and as I looked closer, a heron stood on a rock close by. All the birds get distressed when they have young and a heron is in the vicinity. As I drove further I just missed a beautiful male pheasant as he flew in front of the car but landed safely in the hedgerow. On arriving at Langness, there was a large flock of starlings seemingly playing in the morning sun, chattering, whistling and rising as a unit, only to land again a hundred or so feet away. The sea was still and across Castletown Bay the houses and the Castle reflected in the water. The bellbouy rang in the distance and because of the lack of wind, it was so clear. It was so magical. It was a time when a person feels glad to be alive, but at the same time I felt sad I had no-one with which to share the moment and peace. I decided at that point that I could share it with you. A couple of Shelducks flew over and landed in the dub. Seagulls and Oystercatchers cried in the distance, some flying, some just sitting on the rocks. Skipper rolled in the grass and a pheasant called in the distance. A small orange tipped butterfly fluttered nearby and sat on a flower quite close to me. I did get upset and then I received a phone call on my mobile from my friend Pauline. We chatted, I sniffled and eventually I pulled myself together. I made that cup of tea, took lots of photos and had taken another step in my new life, not entirely on my own as I have friends and I am drawing on strength from my faith.

Another friend Eileen invited me for dinner last week, which I have always declined in the past. Eileen is very supportive and lost her husband just over 3 years ago. She also has an aviary and could be blamed for getting me started in that hobby. Eileen is the friend that makes me laugh until I ache. She also makes a mean lasagna.

I went walking with my friend Ann on Sunday. Ann was the specialist nurse that came weekly to see if Tom was OK and needed anything. She would sit and chat and support us both, giving us hope. She is responsible for Holistic care of patients, body, mind and spirit. She can define it much better than I, but all I can say is that she is a saint. Anyway, she is another friend I have and we walked quite some distance on Sunday morning. I love her company and we chat the whole way. We're supposed to be looking at birds and nature, which we do when pause for breath occasionally. She is the only person I can do that sort of walking with and she doesn't mind my crazy dogs either. We are going to plan our walks better in future so we know where we will actually end up.

Another thing I have been up to recently is finding a Church and form of worship where I feel comfortable and settled. It is amazing how things have worked out for me on that score. Last year when Toms father died, the regular vicar of Malew was on holiday and a stand in vicar was found to do the service. The Reverend Norma Cole from Rushen came and she was wonderful. I was to sing The Old Rugged Cross as it was Toms Fathers favourite and he loved me to sing. It was always going to be difficult as I loved him dearly and he was more a father to me than was my own who died some years ago. Anyway, I didn't make it through without breaking down and the Reverend continued singing the song until I pulled myself together. I was going through a bad time myself at that time, as I knew that Tom’s improvement with the cancer was only temporary and I kept it to myself, as I wanted him to enjoy what he had for as long as he could without that hanging over him. I felt his optimism might drive him forward for longer. I felt a strange affinity to the Reverend and would have loved to have spoken to her, but I didn't and neither did I attend her church. This year when Tom died, the same thing happened. The regular vicar was on holiday and the stand in vicar was none other than the Reverend Norma Cole. Once more she went beyond what is expect as a vicar and sang a chorus at the side of Toms coffin, without accompaniment, "Thou wilt keep him in Perfect Peace." That was because of how Tom felt before and as he was dying and she knew I would like that at the service, but it would be unknown to others. Once more I felt I would like to talk to her personally and I didn't. Then some weeks later she sent a message through my Sister in law Rosie, that if I would like to talk to her, to phone. I did so immediately and have built up quite a relationship with her. I started to go to Church and have never attended C of E in my life. I felt at home there and now I have made a decision to get baptised. Anyway, this is not a baptism for softies. It will be in the sea at Port Erin on the 28th June along with 2 other young people. I wouldn't mind but I have a fear of water. The Vicar says she will be gentle with me though.

Now a pet update; Stitch the canary is doing great and I will do an updated picture at some point. Goosey Gander went back to the vets and had more treatment. Katie the vet managed to cut some tissue away and put stitches in the gooses toe. He will be released this week if all goes well. At the moment he has built a nest at the bottom of the garden and so everyone that has had him down as a gander may get a shock. I will watch that one. Sunday evening I got home and was doing some bits in my aviary when my next-door neighbour, also called Tom, came into the garden holding a suspicious bundle. He then produced what appears to be a day old Moorhen which a seagull dropped. Tom was going away and so he was smiling as he said it would be a shame if it died.

I know absolutely nothing about feeding wild babies, especially a tiny moorhen. I made a few phone calls hoping to find someone to do it for me, but alas, I am sitting here writing this with a baby moorhen calling from its box. I got advice on

what to do and it is being fed on crushed dog food, which I have mixed some egg into, and also some bird food with insects in it. I was pretty stressed yesterday and tried to phone the MSPCA, but only got an answer phone, which I am loath to use. I decided to go with it and maybe I will use this experience to handle stress. It may seem a trivial thing, but I am being treated for stress, anxiety and depression and it only takes something small to slightly upset my routine that I am trying to have and I tend to walk round not completing tasks and taking longer to do anything. So here I am, feeding a baby bird with one of my artist's paintbrushes and we seem to have formed an understanding now.
I have added a picture of a baby moorhen with the biggest feet I have ever seen on a baby. They must grow into their feet. The picture is real, it isn't a photographic illusion.
Bye for now from Barbara on the banks of beloved Silverburn River, paint brush in hand about to give a birdy its next feed.

Variations On A Theme June 14, 2009

What a strange few days weather wise we have had down the south of the Island. I was looking forward to going to the Sugarloaf Rock today with my friend Ann and when she phoned this morning, all was well and the day was beautiful. I went to Church and then I met Tom's Mum, brother Lenny, his wife Rosie and my niece Becky at the Sound and you couldn't see a hand in front of you for mist. I hoped it would lift as the same thing happened yesterday and the mist lifted later in the afternoon. By 3 p.m, the time we was to meet, the mist was still very thick and there was no way we could go to sea and so Ann and I decided we would give walking a miss today. Half an hour later I was walking the dogs at Langness and the mist lifted and out came the gorgeous sunshine. I have had a heavy week of dashing here, there and everywhere and my head is saying stop, slow down and just contemplate. I needed time to just collect my thoughts and realise I have been doing that manic dashing about stuff again. It hasn't helped that I have had nightmares for the last two nights and they have tended to stick in my mind. Last night I was being chased and I was hiding and running all over the place. Someone was chasing me to make me do something I didn't want to do and my night went on like that. The more I ran and hid, I was almost caught again and I would have to run and hide again. It is probably my subconcious living a dream, which is probably reflecting what I have been doing for the past few weeks again. Running, keeping busy, no time to think, meet this person and that person and when night comes I am too tired to do anything but sleep. Now I have to let myself be caught, as running is exhausting. Thinking is sad, but has to be done.
The Insurance still hasn't come for those that may still be wondering. Don't forget, Phoenix are rubbish when it comes to death policies and don't consider the distress they cause.
I have just had a look at the Picnic in the Park just behind our house. It is the busiest and best I have ever seen it. The cars were parked right up to Janet's corner roundabout and the park is pretty full. I believe the chip van ran out of chips and had to go home for more. There were lots of stalls, including the farmer's market stalls. Sumo wrestling, Go carts, bouncy castles, real horse rides, roundabouts, the Tootsie train and loads more. I queued for ages for a Mr Whippy. I don't queue as a rule, but I wasn't go to pass up a chance of my favourite Ice Cream. Everyone was having a great time and the Jazz Aces provided some music. Mr Tony Brown had a little chat with me and asked how I was doing. Sometimes it can't be answered as there beneath the surface the tears are just bubbling. Its funny how you can be surrounded by so many people having such a good time and feel so lonely. There was only one place for me to be and that was home. As soon as I got home I felt better. A baby dove sat in the garden, obviously unable to fly, but safe and I know it is being watched by its parents. Even if it isn't, I have my eye on it. I took another picture of the baby canary that had the stitches and an update of fluffy the baby moorhen. I have been feeding fluffy 1-2 hourly all week and it is now drinking on its own. Hopefully it will be eating on its own in the next few days. I thought it hadn't grown, but Tom and Dee from

next door (who gave it to me) said it certainly had grown. It’s a cheeky little thing and its feet are still growing with every tiny bit that its body does, so there is now way it is catching up yet. Goosey Gander is still in the garden as I'm not sure he is fit enough to survive on the river with his arthritic foot and seems happy at the moment

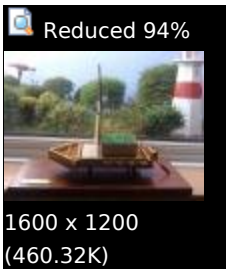
Today I was thinking about work again. I'm still not back at work and wonder if it little analysis would focus my mind. I may call in again this week and see my workmates. It is unbelievable that they still have my job open after over 12 months and continue to support me.

I had a model arrive this week that Tom asked to be built last year. It has taken some time for the scratch built model to arrive and it is a shame that Tom isn't here to see it. It is the Kon Tiki raft in which the Norwegian scientist Thor Heyerdahl and five companions sailed in 1947 from the western coast of South America to the islands east of Tahiti. Heyerdahl was interested in demonstrating the possibility that ancient people from the Americas could have colonized Polynesia; to do so, he constructed Kon-Tiki (named for a legendary Inca god) from locally available balsa logs at Callao, Peru, and in three and a half months traversed some 4,300 miles (6,900 km) of ocean. The Kon-Tiki has been preserved in a museum in Oslo, Norway. Tom wanted to feel what the actual raft was like. I have added a picture of the model made by Phil Walker who has made most of Toms other models, along with update pictures of the birds and the today’s baby dove.

I am now going to read my paper after I have fed Fluffy, and let Orry the parrot out to terrorise me.

I hope you have all had a lovely week and are enjoying the weather we are if not better.

Love from Barbara on the banks of our beautiful Silverburn River



What a Difference June 18, 2009

I have to say that there has been a heck of an improvement in me in the last few days. Yesterday I make a start on the book that will be done between Tom and I. There is quite a bit of material written by Tom and I will do a sort of 'our story' wrapped around it. I am still keeping the title Tom initially thought of "On the Rocks." I feel pleased that I have made a start, albeit a small one.

Today I am going to meet my teamleader and another friend from work for coffee and then I want to go to work and see the teams there again. Last time it was emotionally sapping, but today I am hoping it will be much better for me. I have formulated my own back to work plan, which I will discuss with HR and a representative of UNUM in July. UNUM are the insurance company that our firm pay into for each employee and in the case of long term sickness, UNUM take over paying part of the salary. This has been the position I have been in for over 12 months now as I struggled to cope with the stress and anxiety, which came with the knowledge, I was going to lose Tom. I won't be able to put any plan into action until the doctor has signed me off and that won't be until August at the earliest. I'm chomping at the bit, but it is sensible, as I don't know if this level that I am on at the moment is temporary or not. Certainly the counsellor I have has said that I am loads better and the peaks and troughs are now leveling off instead of being like a giant big dipper. The fact that I can actually formulate a plan or commence a book is something that would have been beyond me a few months ago. Anyway, I am going in the right direction and getting a life as Tom would have wanted me too. It doesn't have the same joy as it did with Tom, but it’s a start. To be honest, when Tom and I first got together I was absolutely besotted but our relationship needed to be worked on. Like most women if I perceived an offhand remark or I felt a little jealous of something, I would use facial expressions and looks for Tom to pick up on. It gives a woman a get out if she has got it wrong. Take for instance a couple where the female feels neglected and has her arms folded and look of misery a husband asks "Is there anything wrong?" Female says grumpily "No." Husband says "Are you sure, you seem quiet?" Female "I'm fine." Bemused husband is not convinced and says "Are you sure I haven't upset you?" Female "No, I'm fine. " This can go on for some time until the female gets what she wants. In my case it had

to be straight and to the point. Any quiet periods and looks went unnoticed, obviously with a blind person and I would be even more wound up that Tom didn't even notice that, mainly because quiet periods to Tom where just that, quiet periods. So it would have to be a straight "Have I upset you, only you haven't spoken much and basically I need a cuddle." Straight and too the point, but it took me sometime to get there and in the case of jealousy, I would end up apologising to Tom for even thinking such a thing.
Anyway, I can see a heron waiting for its breakfast off me, as will be the ducks on the river, my hens and Mr.Goose. Orry is singing away, fluffy has been fed and the aviary will be done before I head to Douglas.
Have a nice day everyone.
Love from Barbara on the busy banks of our beloved Silverburn River.
Just as an aside, Tom is buried in Malew Churchyard and it really is only a stones throw to the Silverburn River where he is facing.

June 30, 2009

I'm snatching an opportunity to do a blog. So much has happened over the last two weeks that I have found it difficult to find the time. Even bedtime as found me hitting the pillow and crashing out immediately. At the moment it is 4.00 a.m. and I am having a wakeful period due partly to the sticky heat we have at the moment. The weather forecasters are giving it getting hotter in the UK this week. On the Island we won't reach the same temperatures thank goodness.
The last time I blogged I was going into work to meet my team leader and a friend. That went well and I went to see different teams that I had dealings within the past and talked happily with them all. I was really pleased that I'd made such an improvement and then as I went to bed that night, I felt such an overwhelming loneliness. The next day didn't improve and I cried most of the day. I don't know why it had such an effect on me whilst I am improving so much in other ways, but it did.
On the Sunday I went on one of my rambles with Anne my walking friend. We always try to do a different walk each time we go out and I have got all the books now that map the walks and distance. Anne left it to me to decide which we would do and only I could have picked not exactly the right walk for the weather we had at that time. We started our walk at 8 a.m. on the Sunday morning meeting in the car park out South Barrule plantation. It was a wet misty morning but still with some warmth. Before we even got started we were descended upon by a swarm of midges. So with walking shoes, our map, waterproof jackets and 2 dogs, we set off through the plantation. We left to the sound of the chaffinches and we were alone for the rest of the walk. It was raining as we left, but that wasn't going to deter us, and the forecast was for it stopping. There wasn't anything really significant that I can remember after such a few weeks to describe.
Elizabeth from Milwaukee loves me to describe walks in my blog as like Tom, she is blind. I will try my best Elizabeth and I will certainly do better next time and do my blogs when it is fresh in my mind. That morning I remember the smells of the forest were strong in my memory. We followed the instructions in the book, which were quite straightforward until it came to phrases like "continue on past a fire break". We had been steadily climbing and knew our ultimate aim was to walk through another forest and eventually we would be at the gate that leads us over South Barrule itself. I think this was when we had our first conundrum. We weren't sure what a firebreak was and thought it was some sort of contraption and then I realised it would be a clearing in the plantation. Whatever, two paths both seemed to have clearings, only one went downhill and the other maintained the height we had climbed. I plumped for staying high up and although the path became quite bad, at least I knew we would eventually come to the place where we would ascend South Barrule, which was the case. When we found the gate I'd have to say that the mist was thick and we couldn't see very much ahead of us at all. This had made our ramble all the harder as after probably a few miles walking, we hadn't really been able to see very much at all and any references to "you will be able to see Langness from this point" were lost on us. Now we were climbing a 1565-foot hill that would have had magnificent views and we could only see a few feet ahead. The advantage was that neither could we see the peak and so we just kept going. Eventually we were at the top and what an achievement that felt. Yes I know it wasn't a mountain or anything but this was a 5-mile walk with a rather large hill thrown in and the terrain I brought us over, wasn't the best. All we had to do after that was descend the other side, but there wasn't an obvious path and so we ended up making the descent through the heather, which was pretty thick in places. We did it though and after 3 hours we were back. Don't laugh! We did do a lot of discussion on which path, what was cuckoo spit, bird identification etc etc. As far as the paths were concerned, we'd decided early on that whatever happened, we were adopting a no blame culture. We sat in our cars at the end fully pleased with ourselves but also slightly embarrassed, as that was the morning after a lot of hardy souls had done the parish walk. 86 miles of walking which took some nearly 24 hours. There is a joy and excitement in rambling like that though. Never knowing what you are going to meet next and feeling totally exhilarated afterwards. We didn't walk last Sunday as my mother was over and it was also my baptism day, but this Sunday we are going to do Slieau Whallian in St.Johns, down

through Barnell, through Patrick to the Raggart and back down the old Railway track to St.Johns. There will be some climbing again, though nothing like the last walk and its 6.5 miles.
Last Sunday was my sea Baptism. It was a beautiful day and couldn't have been better really. There was a service on the beach first and then I and a few others had to walk down to the sea. I'd have to say I hung back to the very last, such was my fear of water. I cannot remember being above my ankles in the sea since I was very young and so besides it being a very public Baptism, for me it really was walking out in faith with a smile on my face. The Bishop is a lovely man and so approachable. It was an honour to be baptised by two lovely people, Bishop Robert as he is known, and the Vicar Norma who has become a Spiritual Sister in a way. In the past I have mentioned that she did the burial service for both Tom and his Father. She has so much love for people and through her own experiences of pain and suffering, she has empathy and understanding. Rather than explain, I will put the pictures on and I can only apologise for showing a bit too much flesh when I came out of the water. I was gasping for breath in panic and was rather dazed. I had lots of people supporting me along with others who were also being baptised and members of the church. Lots of people feel that the churches are dying and there is no one in them, but on the Island, I and many others feel there is a revival happening. I also thougt the churches were empty until I actually visited some of them. It was a shock to see how many people do worship and it is only when you see it that you realise how misguided are those that don't go to church. Not long ago there were a lot more people in the pubs than appeared to be in the churches. The balance has now been addressed and there are definately more in the Churches. It’s amazing how many young people are involved as well. Increasingly more people are having a public show of faith by being baptised in the sea and as well as the people in Port Erin at the weekend, it was also happening in Peel again with the Living Hope Church. I have no intention of preaching on my blog, but I did want to let people know that The Boss as Tom called him, is at work on the Island and I find it quite exciting.
On the bird front, my little moorhen is really coming on now. In the days I put it in the aviary and in the evening I let it follow me in the house and it sits cuddled up to me until it is time to go to its own little bed, which is still heated for comfort. It can jump quite big heights and its feet are still growing at the rate of its body, so it never catches its feet up.
That's it for now folks. It is nearly 6 a.m. and I may have another hour before getting up. Today is my mother's last day before going home tomorrow. She came to support me at the baptism and also escape the thunderstorms in the UK.
I should have more time to blog now the Baptism is done.
This is a sleepy Barbara on the banks of the Silverburn River.

A Walk Up the Silverburn River July 4, 2009

Quite a few people love me to do descriptive walks and none more than Elizabeth who lives in Milwaukee and has been and friend of Tom’s long before I married him. Elizabeth, like Tom, is blind and so to all who like those type of blogs, I have done one especially for you. I woke at 4 a.m. on Thursday and knowing I wasn't going to go back to sleep in a hurry, I decided that instead of lying there trying for hours, I would get up and take the dogs for an early morning walk along the Silverburn River. The first thing that greeted me as I opened the door that morning was the sweet smell of the meadow and newly cut grass. On the riverbank the ducks were still sleeping and a moorhen took advantage on the peace. Doves and chaffinches sang as I urged my tired dog Suzie to come along on the walk. Skipper was in his element, which was evident by running. As I went along I came across a part of the river that Tom used to decide how fierce it ran or lazily as it rippled across the pebbles and stones in the river. A little wren bobbed in and out of the bushes at the other side of the river. Apart from a far off aeroplane, there was an absence of the traffic that can normally be heard in the distance. The cows all lay in the field across the river and I hoped that is where they would stay until returned from my jaunt. A fish jumped in the almost still water and the midges had breakfast on my blood. Suzie had woken by this time and was enjoying her walk. I looked back on my favourite scene of the Golden Meadow Mill with an elderflower tree growing at the side and the ivy climbing the mill. Blackberries budded and I pondered the jams I would be making later in the year. It was a still, beautiful day and although warm, it was great for walking and the dogs. A seagull cried in the distance and the breeze ruffled the leaves of the trees. As I walked across the field, 2 wood pigeons flew ahead and I was watched by the cows as they continued to lie across the field. I heard a cockerel in the distance. I stood and listened for a while and felt at one with everything around me. The field had quite a lot of thistle growing and the goldfinches, which have been plentiful in my garden and the park this year, would relish that. A hooded crow flew to the other side of the field with what looked to be a mouse in his beak. A few willow warblers called to each other from the thick bushes and a pheasant called in the distance. I saw a sparrow hawk fly into a tree and hide amongst the foliage. I hoped he wouldn't catch any of the sweet singing birds I had heard. The traffic could now be heard building up from 5.15. As I walked along it was like listening to a CD that has birdsong and rivers, only this was real and all mine. Skipper played in the river under a sycamore tree and I thanked my lucky stars that Suzie hadn't rolled in any cowpats. High in the sky a

long tailed tit twittered past me and the swallows found a good source of food. As I approached the end of the field I remembered the herons that nested there earlier in year and had now fledged and how Tom and I were fascinated when we first heard them, shouting clack, clack, clack as they waited for their parents to return with food. I could hear the Castletown bellbouy ringing in the distance, the sound being carried on the breeze. As I walked through the gate leaving the field, there was lots of seeded grasses and dock. I forgot to bring a bag to carry the greens back with me. I always went up the river to pick dandelions, seeded grasses, sorrel, dock to name a few for my aviary birds. They adore everything I bring back. I could hear the waterfall not as roaring as can be when there has been rain, but still loud enough for me to know when I am approaching it. A couple of birds flew past with nesting material in their beaks and a heron flew to the fir trees that they nest in. I doubt they would have a second nest this year. Everything smelled so sweet and as I walked away from the river, the bird sound receded, as there weren't as many trees about. A great back black gull flew over and the swallows still dipped and dived as they fed on the wing. I stood for a while and listened to some more birdsong. I smelled the meadow sweet that came on the warm breeze and appeared to perfume the whole area I was in. Another sparrow hawk flew into a Rowan tree and I could hear the ducks in the distance. There was wild angelica; birds foot trefoil and lots of long grass swaying gently in the welcome breeze. I read that sparrow hawks only eat birds. I had presumed they would eat mice and such, but apparently not, therefore when I see a sparrow hawk looking for a meal, although its unpleasant to watch, he has to eat to survive. There was a beautiful pale buff butterfly with a touch of orange on his wings. Bales of hay lay in rolls across the river in the field. I neared the bridge that holds lot of memories for me with Tom. On mornings such as this one, Tom and I would rise early; make a flask and head up the river before I went to work. Tom would sit on the bridge drinking coffee and having a smoke of his pipe whilst I picked seeded grasses for my birds. At that time we thought the pipe was fine and would save Tom from lung cancer. We both gave up the cigarettes 17 years earlier. Tom took the pipe up and took up nicorette chewing gum. I became addicted to that and chewed it for 12 years. I think you could say I have an addictive personality. Anyway, after an early morning walk, I would go to work and I felt exhilarated after my walk and time with Tom, whilst everyone else would be sleepily trying to pull themselves together.

I could hear a magpie in the distance and that would sound the alarm calls by other little birds. Malew Church came into view which meant Toms grave was probably only around 250 yards away. A raven flew over and I continued wandering up the river amongst the foxglove and lots of other pretty wild flowers, which I wish I knew the names of. Lots of poppies grew along with milk thistle and a little rabbit ran away in the distance. Skipper took this opportunity to eat some of his favourite grass. The fields I walked along didn't have the normal wheat and barley, but some vegetables. The sparrow hawk flew past me with its breakfast firmly in his beak. As the trees became more plentiful, the bird song became loud again. I approached the area where Tom and I would come blackberrying. Tom would hold the carrier bag whilst I got purple fingers. e would like to try the occasional big juicy one and I can remember the smile on his face when he nicked them. We had a guide dog called Escort that hated us going blackberrying. He was really impatient and would whine the whole time, that was until I introduced him to blackberries and he realised they were edible.

I decided it was time to turn round now and return home. It started to rain and the threat of thunder caused a little panic in me. If Tom had been with me he would have been able to hear if there was any thunder about long before me. I headed for home a lot quicker than I walked to Ballasalla. The 1st plane started its descent and I checked my watch to see it was 6.15. As I neared Poulson Park the rain became torrential and I was walking down the middle of the rugby field to avoid the trees. At the same time I felt good to be getting a bit of a wetting in the heat.

When I returned home, Orry was still asleep as was the little moorhen. The moorhen has certainly been coming on in the last week. He is losing his black colour and going brownish with buff stripes on his tummy. I know e as a lot of developing to do yet, but it's amazing to watch and monitor. He now spends his days in the aviary and lets me know when he feels it's time to come in the house. The dogs are fine with him and he knows his way around the house now as was evident the other morning when he came up the stairs to the bedroom to find me. Last night I looked everywhere for him as he had gone quiet. I couldn't find him and decided that he must have gone out and been snaffled by a gull or heron. My spirits plummeted and I decided there was nothing I could do now and I might as well go to bed. As I climbed the stairs I heard a distant mewing and yes, it was my moorhen. I followed the sound and he had ensconced himself in the bottom of my wardrobe in the bedroom, as I hadn't shut the door properly. I was pleased to say the least.

Tonight the goose doesn't seem too well and I'm not sure if he will survive. I have given him food and water and tried to make him comfortable. If he does die I will be sad, but all I know is that he is a very, very old goose. Toms father used to say someone had put the goose on the river quite some years ago. He would have had an idea how old the goose is, but all I know is that the goose was old when Tom and I moved into this house 11 years ago.

Anyway, that's it for now. I will add some photos of the canary and moorhen and you will be able to see the changes. Just before I go you may be interested to know the manky insurance company called PHOENIX have still not settled the death policy. Their latest excuse is that the bank have to company stamp and sign a discharge form and until they do, no money. This is despite them saying the money would be in the bank at the latest last Tuesday. There appears to be

nothing I can do about this and they just don't have a heart or any compassion. Tom has been gone over 4 months and they still haven't settled.
On that note I will close with love from Barbara on the lovely scented banks of the Silverburn River.

July 12, 2009 Sleiu Whellian, Laughs, Memories And What A Hike!

Today I and my friend Anne decided we would do another walk out of our rambling book. Today's was to be Sleiu Wellian at St.Johns to almost to the Rushen mines and then down to Barnell on the Patrick road. Had all gone according to plan we were also going to walk back down the railway line from the Raggart to St.Johns. I had to be up and about early as I'd arranged to meet Anne at 8 a.m. just on the Patrick Road, at the St.Johns end over the road from the lane and cottage that I owned when I met Tom. That in itself brought back memories of both before our relationship and afterwards. Anyway, I was raring to go as I had never actually done this walk before as I'd heard it was a bit bad underfoot. It wasn't somewhere I could take Tom and I feel that rambling walks into the countryside should be done by two people in case an ankle is turned or whatever. That is why I am enjoying our explorative walks more than ever because they are energetic in themselves without just walking. Well they are when you follow instructions like Anne and I. We started by walking up the road and going over a stile part way up the road and we were quickly into the forest. I knew this forest well from my time in St.Johns as I used to climb it twice a day and loved to test my fitness by running to the top. Time has moved on and walking fast up it is not an option now, but we did climb to the top and couldn't find a gate that we were supposed to go through. Down we went and decided to take another route only to come across the stone wall that we should see but no gate. Lots and lots of barbed wire though. So we or perhaps I should say I decided that instead of walking the paths, we should walk vertical up the forest by the stone wall until we came across a gate. Talk about steep! We made it though, well as far as another line of barbed wire which now ran through the forest and blocked our path. Going down would have been great if we had been kids with a flattened cardboard box to sit on, if we'd have been able to do the trees of course. As it was we just went back down gripping branches for brakes until we got to the path. Anne suggested we actually walk it in the opposite direction and then hopefully we would find the elusive gate on the way back. As we wandered down the hill we were almost at the entrance we came in when I saw another little used path that possibly could be the one we needed. I told Anne that if we tried it and this failed then I was going to give in and we'd go to Tynwald Mills for a cuppa. We had messed about in the forest for an hour and we hadn't even started, but we hadn't half had a warm up. As we walked along there was quite a bit of fern and it brought back memories of when we lived in Ramsey and Tom found a tick under his armpit, fully ensconced in sucking his blood. Before I went to work that morning I soaked it with meth's and as a rule that would have been the end. He turned up at work a bit later in the day wondering if I could help as it was irritating and still hanging on. I then tried burning it with a cigarette as I'd that would surely kill it, but it still hung on. In the end I had a brain wave and decided I would gently burn it with a lighter that Tom had which just lit up a ringed part for his pipe which he smoked at this time. I never thought for a moment that with all the neat meth's, alcohol and everything else I had used to kill it, that his armpit would go up like a forest fire. I did manage to put it out without Tom being hurt and thankfully the tick met his maker. Anyway, back to our walk and we did come across another stile, not a gate as was mentioned in the book. We saw two cyclists walking up the path and discussing how steep it was for a while, but bingo, we'd found the elusive path. We hadn't been walking long before 4 trials bikes came passed us and we had to hold the dogs until all was clear. A little later as we continued on our upward climb another few bikes came passed and one biker said we would be ok once we got onto the Barnell path as they were all turning left. The views were stunning looking back towards Peel to Douglas valley and the St.Johns to Foxdale valley. We identified landmarks and the sun was now shining after a stuttering start. It was clear and beautiful. As we turned eventually onto the Barnell track, we could see trials bikes in a field and felt quite safe that they were going to have nothing to do with us. I don't think it was long after that the 1st trial bike came towards us from Patrick. It was a bit of a shock as they had been coming from behind on the other track and now they were meeting us on a much narrower lane that was rocky and hard to walk at the best of times. All the bikers were really polite and thanked us we thought we'd enquire from this of the first bikers on this road as to whether there were anymore coming. "There's about 50." he said and we thanked him for telling us but it wasn't what we wanted to hear. The path got worse and each time a bike came, we flung ourselves into the nearest hedge. My worst experience was when I flung myself into a gorse bush. It was a nightmare and one of those were everything becomes extremely funny because it's so bad. I had to pull myself together lots of times as I was in danger of losing the plot. Anne lost her footing at one stage and went sprawling, such was the state of the lane with uneven rocks and massive big ruts. I can see why it would be brilliant for bikers. Trust us to pick that walk when there were bike trials going on. We eventually staggered to the road and all I can say is that the views were gorgeous, but the path itself would not tempt me back to do it again. The views as such that taking a photo would not be good enough for someone to appreciate. That can only happen by being there, turning 360 degrees and

savouring everything your senses can see, hear and smell. I did take a photo on the way down as I loved the scene from Patrick to Peel and there is a 3 legs of man which can be seen in a field made up of different typed of grasses to make the design stand out. I believe this was done by the prisoners of war in the WW2 that were at Knockaloe. If I'm wrong I will stand corrected. I got back to the car pretty shattered and have a painful knee again which has happened after great climbs and only hurts going downhill or as now, going down the stairs. Tomorrow it will be fine if last time was anything to go by, but I would love to hear from someone who may know what may be the cause of this and if there is something to help me stop it on my rambling days, besides not going up hills. I love these walks, but the pain going down is something else again.

This last week has not been the best for me as regards the grieving process and was triggered when I heard the insurance money was delayed yet again by PHEONIX. That is despite the bank having a fax 3 weeks ago saying the money would be put in a 48 hour transfer. The latest excuse is that they want a discharge letter from the bank that has been stamped the banks company stamp and signed through the middle. The bank have already sent 3 discharge letters and each one is not to PHEONIX satisfaction. The bank are furious, the broker is furious and I am finding it dragging me down. All I can think is if Tom was here what he would do, it would never happen and he'd sort them out and then I get lower. This week I have wished I could turn back the clock and have Tom back and my cosy, loving life. I has eaten away at me and I have cried buckets. Each day I have lost another pound in weight as I never get hungry and forget to eat. I always eat something at lunchtime, but if that is only a bap, I won't be hungry later and forget to eat. It's only the next day that I work out I haven't eaten for so long and am still not hungry. Sleeping is a problem with me waking every night for probably 2 or 3 hours and maybe I go back to sleep and maybe I don't. So some nights it can be 3 hours sleep and others I may get 5. I went to the doctors on Thursday as I myself was worried that I was slipping back into depression. I'd been at my friends Pauline and Rays in the afternoon and couldn't stop crying and didn't want to talk either. I just wanted Tom, plainly and simply although it is impossible. I have picked up and there will be more medical stuff this week, but anyone grieving out there may like to know that it was all still put down to the grieving process and is quite normal. Everyone's grief is different and each cope with it in their own way.

A week last Wednesday Sean and Wendy came back to the Island for the Viking festival. I managed to find a window in the weather and Toms friend Michael took us to the Sugarloaf Rock and round the Calf in Toms boat, the Silverburn. I'm waiting for some pictures from them to put on here for you all. They had a great time whilst they were over and I really do think they should do a blog, such are their exploits and two very, very interesting people.

Mr. Goosey was put to sleep on Thursday which as sad. His muscles in his left leg had collapsed and he was no longer able to get around which caused his chest to get the equivalent of bed sores and he was soiling himself. There was no quality of life left and he was in pain. the moorhen spends every day in the aviary and is keeping it all clean from worms etc and he comes into the house in the evening. He really does think I am his mum and he just acts like any of the other animals in the house. He goes to a bowl with water to bath and defecate and is a right little character. Any morning that I have found it hard to wake after a bad night, he is up the stairs with his little calling sound and eventually he will find a way on the bed and runs excited to sit on my chest and chatter away in moorhen. He is developing wings and feathers and still has a lot of changing colour to do before he is a fully grown up moorhen.

I think that is it for now folks. I will leave you with some pictures and will write again soon. I wonder which will come first, my next blog or the insurance money?

I've shown a good path on the way down the track. This deteriorated rapidly and I haven't taken any pics of that. I was too busy throwing myself in the hedges and trying to negotiate the track. I have also included the latest picture of the baby cockatiel which can now fly, but has some feathers to come. The moorhen makes an entry as well and there are more of him/her but I'll show them again.

Love from Barbara and her menagerie on the banks of the beautiful Silverburn.